

# **Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B**

*By Electronic Mail*

May 24, 2021

Everett Lott, Interim Director  
District Department of Transportation

RE: Requesting Traffic Safety Improvements on Aspen Street, NW

Dear Interim Director Lott:

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B, at a duly noticed public meeting, with a quorum being the “majority of the total number of commissioner positions currently filled in Commission 4B,” at its May 24, 2021, meeting voted with \_ Yeas, \_ Nays, and \_ Abstentions to send this letter to the Director of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) requesting traffic safety improvements on Aspen Street, NW, between Blair Road, NW, and Georgia Avenue, NW.

For years, residents on Aspen Street, NW, have sought traffic calming. They have experienced car crashes resulting from speeding and reckless driving, significant cut-through traffic, and a steady stream of commercial vehicles on their residential street. These residents have sought action from DDOT to calm traffic, limit commercial vehicles, and make this residential street safer, but they have seen no action. While Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B understands Aspen Street, NW, is a “collector” street, the Commission requests meaningful consideration of all available traffic calming measures and implementation of measures, where appropriate, to ensure the safety of all road users.

## **Past Traffic Safety Assessment Requests**

On September 6, 2019, a resident submitted a Traffic Safety Assessment questionnaire to DDOT for Aspen Street, NW, between Blair Road, NW, and Piney Branch Road, NW (attached). As noted in the relevant questionnaire, the affected area raises numerous safety concerns within a residential area, including speeding and aggressive driving, particularly from vehicles using Aspen Street as a thoroughfare from Blair Road, NW, to Piney Branch Road, NW, Georgia Avenue, NW, and 16th Street, NW (in both directions). The questionnaire noted several crashes along Aspen Street, NW, including drivers hitting pedestrians, stop signs, and trees. In addition, the questionnaire noted illegal commercial vehicle traffic along the street.

Commissioner Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02, submitted a letter in support of the Traffic Safety Assessment questionnaire for Aspen Street, NW, between Blair Road, NW, and Piney Branch Road, NW (attached), noting the affected area is residential with significant pedestrian and bicycle traffic, including children and seniors, who are more vulnerable to traffic injuries and fatalities. Takoma Education Campus, the Takoma Metro, a day care, the Takoma Aquatic Center, and several additional schools are located in close proximity, and many residents walk or bike to these facilities. The letter also highlighted that numerous residents had raised concerns regarding heavy trucks on the street and the accompanying noise, traffic, and shaking of their homes.

DDOT acknowledged the Traffic Safety Assessment Questionnaire for Aspen Street, NW, between Blair Road, NW, and Piney Branch Road, NW on September 10, 2019, and assigned the request service number 19-00887735. Although DDOT has indicated it takes approximately [120 days](#) to develop recommendations in response to a traffic safety assessment, and even though this request pre-dates the public health emergency, the request is still open 20 months later. In providing an update, DDOT has stated: "Due to the clas[s]ification of the road, Aspen St is a collector road, therefore we are unable to install speed humps. Each intersection on Aspen St between Piney Branch and Blair Rd NW is controlled by a stop sign or a signal. DDOT is assessing to determin[e] if we can install additional speeding limit signs and or other traffic calming measures."

On April 12, 2021, a resident submitted a Traffic Safety Assessment questionnaire to DDOT for Aspen Street, NW, between Piney Branch Road, NW, and Georgia Avenue, NW (attached). As noted in the relevant questionnaire, cars regularly speed through the area (even though there are two speed humps) and commercial vehicles drive along the street, obstructing residential traffic and impeding sight lines.

Commissioner Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02, submitted a letter in support of the Traffic Safety Assessment questionnaire for Aspen Street, NW, between Piney Branch Road, NW, and Georgia Avenue, NW (attached), noting the proximity of various neighborhood hubs, including the Shepherd Park Library and area schools and daycares, as well as the 8th Street neighborhood bikeway, bus lines that service Georgia Avenue, NW, and the Takoma Metro, and that many residents walk or bike to these spots. The letter also noted speeding and aggressive driving, particularly from vehicles using Aspen Street as a thoroughfare from Blair Road, NW, to Piney Branch Road NW, Georgia Avenue, NW, and 16th Street, NW, (in both directions) and that there has been an increase in traffic due to construction at the Walter Reed Campus, and residents anticipate even more traffic once the Campus is fully developed. Finally, the letter noted specific concerns related to the intersection at Georgia Avenue, NW and Aspen Street, NW, related to sight lines and turning access.

DDOT acknowledged the Traffic Safety Assessment questionnaire for Aspen Street, NW, between Piney Branch Road, NW, and Georgia Avenue, NW on April 12, 2021, and assigned the request service number 21-00124739.

## **Past Action to Limit Commercial Vehicles**

On June 25, 2019, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B approved a [Letter of Inquiry](#) to DDOT, along with the District Department of Public Works and the Metropolitan Police Department's Motor Carrier Safety Unit, addressing the use of heavy trucks on Aspen Street, NW, and other residential streets within the Commission's boundaries. The Commission noted "numerous complaints from residents within our Commission's boundaries about the travel of heavy trucks on residential streets with posted signage limiting vehicles that have greater than 1 ¼ ton capacity." The Commission requested information regarding steps taken by these agencies to prevent the improper travel of heavy trucks on residential streets and details regarding all available mechanisms to enforce limitations on the use of heavy trucks on residential streets.

Following a limited response from DDOT, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B approved a follow-up [Letter of Inquiry](#) on April 26, 2021, stating: "there is no meaningful way for Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B or residents to report and seek enforcement for commercial vehicles on residential roads and there are no mechanisms in place to slow or discourage commercial vehicle cut-through traffic." In that letter, the Commission requested, among other things, "meaningful consideration of mechanisms to slow or discourage commercial vehicle cut-through traffic, reduce collisions, and protect pedestrians, including via the traffic safety assessment process and implementation of additional four-way stops, crosswalk protection and visibility, and other traffic calming interventions that would help reduce speed, noise, and road wear."

## **Traffic Safety Improvement Requests**

Aspen Street, NW, is increasingly used for cut-through traffic (in both directions) and requires traffic calming for the safety of all road users, particularly as DDOT considers routing the Metropolitan Branch Trail along part of Aspen Street, NW. Traffic calming measures are both feasible and necessary to ensure the safety of all road users, including the following:

- Although Aspen Street, NW, is a "collector" street and is therefore not technically eligible for speed humps, there are two speed humps on Aspen Street, NW, between Piney Branch Road, NW, and Georgia Avenue, NW (a medium sized speed hump around 810 Aspen Street, NW, and a smaller speed hump around 910 Aspen Street, NW). DDOT has provided no information regarding how or why it installed these speed humps. Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B requests consideration of additional speed humps along Aspen Street, NW, between Blair Road, NW, and Piney Branch Road, NW, and information regarding installation of the speed humps currently in place.
- DDOT should consider additional traffic calming measures along Aspen Street, NW, to physically slow speeding cars and provide pedestrian protections and visual cues for drivers to watch for pedestrians. These measures could include speed tables, raised

crosswalks, raised stop bars, and rumble strips, as well as bulb-outs/curb extensions, medians, pedestrian refuges, protected intersections, and gateway entry treatments. Aspen Street, NW, appears to widen at several points, including at Aspen Street, NW, and Piney Branch Road, NW, and at Aspen Street, NW, from 6th Street, NW, to Blair Road, NW, in part because fewer cars park on the street and there is a downhill slope. DDOT should consider additional measures to modify those visual cues that encourage speeding.

- DDOT should also consider bioswales and other green infrastructure as a traffic calming measure and work with DC Water and the District Department of Energy and Environment in that regard. The District Department of Energy and Environment and the Chesapeake Bay Trust recently awarded neighbors along the 400 block of Aspen Street, NW, a Community Stormwater Solutions Grant to design a holistic solution to blockwide stormwater challenges. These neighbors and other residents would benefit from the dual benefit of additional green infrastructure and traffic calming.
- On December 17, 2019, a woman was killed, and three people, including a child, were injured in a crash at the intersection of Blair Road, NW, and Aspen Street, NW. Neighbors expressed deep concern, noting longstanding problems with the intersection. In response, the office of the then-Ward 4 Councilmember noted: “DDOT is working on the Met Branch Trail project, which includes safety enhancements at the intersection of Aspen St and Blair Rd NW, where they plan to convert one of the northbound lanes into a trail....This will deter drivers from speeding in the two northbound lanes.... DDOT also proposed improvements for nearby intersections, Aspen/Sandy Spring/Willow and Blair Rd and 3rd St NW.” No changes have been made to this intersection. The Metropolitan Branch Trail will bring additional bicycle and pedestrian traffic to Blair Road, NW, and possibly Aspen Street, NW, requiring DDOT’s consideration of additional specific traffic calming at that intersection. DDOT should consider exclusive signal phases for pedestrians and bicyclists as part of this project that will allow them to safely cross Blair Road, NW, and Aspen Street, NW, as well as lengthening existing pedestrian and bicycle intervals and intersection treatments to alert drivers to the high volume of pedestrian and bicycle movements, all way crossing (“Barnes Dance”) intervals, raised intersections, and paint treatments (crosshatching), and ground murals.
- Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B has previously weighed in on Aspen Street, NW, east of Blair Road, NW. DDOT’s consideration of traffic calming and implementation of traffic safety measures should include a holistic view of proposed changes east of Blair Road, NW. See [Resolution 4B-21-0206](#), Providing Feedback on 65% Design of Metropolitan Branch Trail from Fort Totten to Takoma (Feb. 22, 2021); Traffic Safety Assessment Questionnaire, Service Request Number 20-00029104 (Jan. 21, 2020); [Resolution 4B-19-0501](#), Supporting Safety Modifications for the Intersection of Aspen Street NW, Sandy Spring Road NW, and Willow Street NW (May 20, 2019). The Commission urges DDOT to adequately provide necessary traffic calming for students and families that cross this intersection to attend various neighborhood schools,

including Breakthrough Montessori, Takoma Education Campus, Whittier Education Campus, Ida B. Wells Middle School, and Coolidge Senior High School, including consideration of a Safe Routes to School assessment.

- Residents have also raised concerns about speeding in the alley behind the 6701 block of Georgia Avenue, NW, between Whittier Place, NW, and Aspen Street, NW, and have requested consideration of traffic calming along that alley. Cars regularly speed and drive recklessly in an attempt to avoid traffic on surrounding streets.
- Residents along Aspen Street, NW, continue to raise concerns with regard to commercial vehicles – including heavy trucks, semi-tractor trailers, not-in-service city busses, and chartered and intercity busses. These commercial vehicles not only affect the quality of life for residents by shaking their homes and producing large quantities of diesel exhaust and noise pollution, they damage local road infrastructure and pose disproportionate safety hazards for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians for whom use of these neighborhood streets are theoretically prioritized. See [Resolution 4B-20-0101](#), “Supporting Increased Funding and Expansion of the Metropolitan Police Department’s Motor Carrier Unit” (Jan. 27, 2020). In addition to traffic calming measures that would make Aspen Street, NW, less desirable for commercial vehicle travel, DDOT should provide clearly visible, additional signage (with a preference for the image-based sign of a truck with a line through it over the “NO THRU TRUCKS” signs that are small and hard to read) and consider providing an Oversize Commercial Vehicle camera unit (to the extent that such a camera would be in addition to the two Oversize Commercial Vehicle camera units currently in operation and would not result in removing a camera unit from one of those already existing locations).
- Several crosswalks along Aspen Street, NW, are unmarked or are not [ladder crosswalks](#), including Georgia Avenue, NW, and Aspen Street, NW (see Service Request Number 21-00168367 (May 13, 2021)); 6th Street, NW, and Aspen Street, NW (see Service Request Number 21-00168352 (May 13, 2021)); and 5th Street, NW, and Aspen Street, NW (see Service Request Number 20-00257029 (July 24, 2020)). Paint is the bare minimum of what DDOT can offer in terms of traffic calming and, as noted above, protected crosswalks and other traffic calming should also be considered.
- DDOT should consider additional speed limit signs, pedestrian crossing signs, and pedestrian pylons along Aspen Street, NW. Currently, there are only a handful of speed limit sign, including some that are completely obstructed (see, e.g. Service Request Number 21-00168298 (May 13, 2021)), and these signs are posted for 25 miles per hour when the District has committed to a [20 mile per hour speed limit on residential roads](#). There is no other pedestrian signage along the street. Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B notes the existing speed limit signs and stop signs have not stopped speeding and reckless driving along Aspen Street, NW. Signage is the bare minimum of what DDOT can offer in terms of traffic calming.

- Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B prefers physical traffic calming measures to enforcement, as traffic calming better ensures vehicles do not reach speeds where they can damage property or harm road users. The Commission requests consideration of an automated traffic enforcement camera for Aspen Street, NW, to the extent additional traffic calming measures are legitimately not feasible and to the extent such a camera would be in addition to the cameras currently in operation and would not result in removing a camera unit from an existing location.
- DDOT should consider additional educational efforts related to behavioral change would assist in traffic calming along roads that are not eligible for speed humps.

DDOT has committed to making our city's streets safer, including by addressing Vision Zero traffic-related safety issues throughout the city, in part through the Traffic Safety Assessment process. When the street at issue is a "collector" street, the traffic calming measures DDOT will implement are limited, even though the street might greatly benefit from traffic calming measures, including those that physically slow speeding cars. See, e.g., Dale Drive in Silver Spring, Maryland (including bulb-outs, pedestrian refuges, signage, and other traffic calming). At times, it seems that DDOT is only willing to do the bare minimum regarding traffic safety on these roads and only acts meaningfully to protect pedestrians and cyclists when an individual is killed or seriously injured due to cars speeding and driving recklessly.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B would appreciate details regarding all available traffic calming options, DDOT's assessment of every option, any data collected, and information regarding any DDOT informational or educational campaigns regarding traffic safety citywide. Thank you for your attention to our concerns and for addressing traffic safety issues and working to ensure our neighborhood streets are safe for all road users.

The Commission also voted with \_ Yeas, \_ Nays, and \_ Abstentions to appoint the Commissioner for Single Member District 4B02, Erin Palmer, or any member of the Executive Committee in their absence, to be authorized to communicate this letter and represent Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B in communication with your agency regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02 Commissioner

cc: Councilmember Mary M. Cheh, Chair, Committee on Transportation & the Environment  
Michael Porcello, Legislative & Committee Director, Committee on Transportation & the Environment

Councilmember Janeese Lewis George (Ward 4)

Sayra Molina, Program Analyst - Community Engagement, DC Department of Transportation

David C. Jones, ANC Liaison, DC Department of Transportation

Sgt. James Schaeffer, Metropolitan Police Department, Motor Carrier Safety Unit

Evelyn Lopez, ANC Liaison, Metropolitan Police Department

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