

Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B



[DRAFT] RESOLUTION #4B-24-0302

Calling for Greater Transparency and Coordination in Permitting Neighborhood Utility Work and Improvements to DC Transportation Online Permitting System Adopted March 25, 2024

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B (Commission) takes note of the following:

- Several areas within Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B have had concentrated work by multiple utility companies, including Washington Gas's [PROJECTpipes](#) pipeline replacement program; DC Water's [Capital Improvement Project](#) for lead service line replacement; and Pepco's [DC PLUG](#) initiative to place new or existing overhead electric distribution facilities underground. Each of these projects has involved extensive excavation and use of public space, often requiring alternative traffic detours and parking limitations.
- The District Department of Transportation maintains an online application system for public space permits called the [Transportation Online Permitting System](#) (TOPS). Utility providers, among others, can use this online system to apply for the specific type of public space occupancy, construction, excavation, or other permit required, including permits to occupy metered and unmetered curbside parking, sidewalk, alley, or travel lane areas for construction-related work. The TOPS application system also includes a [public space permit lookup tool](#) that includes some permit information on an interactive map, which an individual can look up by specific address, intersection, or block.
- In theory, TOPS should be a resource that allows residents, as well as Commissioners, to understand, track, and predict projects in our neighborhoods. In reality, residents are often confused and frustrated by the short notice for large-scale and long-term utility work, as well as the lack of coordination among utilities for large-scale projects, which can mean several months of work concentrated in the same areas and repeated damage to sidewalks and streets. Commissioners have received multiple complaints about no parking signs posted with almost no notice and extending for weeks or even months at a time, as well as inferior restoration of public space. Commissioners have regularly raised these

challenges to the Mayor's Office of Community Relations and Services and the Ward 4 Councilmember's office at monthly Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B meetings.

- Notices and reporting procedures for public space work are inadequate for the public to ensure existing District laws, such as those related to safe accommodations for vulnerable road users, are followed. In fact, local organizations have been so stymied by incomprehensible reporting mechanisms that they have created both [a guide to reporting](#) and [an unofficial form](#) for reporting. Other District agencies do significantly better: the District Department of Energy and Environment, for example, posts notices that clearly communicate the problems that can and should be reported ("If you see runoff") and provide a specific email and phone number to report those problems.
- The lack of coordination for large-scale utility projects is inefficient, as well. For one example, Commissioners communicated extensively with Pepco over months about damage caused by the utility's DC PLUG work along Piney Branch Road, NW, which left the area without previously-existing protected bike lanes for months. See [Resolution 4B-23-0801](#), Calling for Additional Hardening of Protected Bike Lane on Piney Branch Road, NW, Due to Repeated Damage (Aug. 28, 2023) ("Commissioner Evan Yeats, ANC 4B04, contacted Pepco in June 2023 regarding their plans for restoration of the protected bike lane, including a walk through with Pepco on June 29, 2023, where Pepco indicated that the majority of the damage was pre-existing to their work and that they would restore any damage they had caused."). Although the protected bike lane was restored, including flexposts and concrete barriers, in late summer 2023, shortly thereafter Washington Gas began utility work and removed the replaced infrastructure again. This is a cycle residents and Commissioners regularly experience.
- "Dig Once" policies encourage best practices with regard to major infrastructure projects. As noted by the [National League of Cities](#), "Dig Once policies minimize disruptions due to excavation and construction of existing critical infrastructure like roadways or sewer systems by installing or laying the groundwork for new, much needed ... infrastructure at the same time." Coordinating across large utility projects avoids duplication and reduces costs, reduces health and noise impacts of construction, and minimizes waste created through construction projects.

RESOLVED:

- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the District Department of Transportation to improve the [Transportation Online Permitting System](#) (TOPS) and the [public space permit lookup tool](#), including by:

- updating the public space permit lookup tool to be more user friendly for the general public by leading with basic information about a permit (entity awarded the permit, activity permitted, timeline) and including a link to the utility’s public-facing information about the project and clearly listing a point of contact for the relevant utility;
 - establishing a mechanism within TOPS for Commissioners and the public to track specific locations (e.g., blocks) for permitting activity and to receive notification for activity within those locations, similar to a feature previously offered by the District Department of Buildings’ Civic Insight web application;
 - providing a map-based view of currently issued permits (and not the requirement to enter an address, block, or intersection) so that residents and Commissioners can easily determine what work is occurring in a geographic area without knowing a specific address; and
 - providing regular permit reports to Commissions, similar to those provided by the Department of Buildings with regard to permits accepted and issued within the Commission area;
- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the District Department of Transportation to revise its policies for engagement with neighbors regarding large-scale and long-term utility work, including by:
- providing a longer notice period to residents, particularly where road closure and parking limitations are more extensive;
 - requiring flyering of neighbors for large-scale and long-term utility (and other infrastructure) work; and
 - ensuring notices for work include a specific point of contact for complaints and lay out clearly the standard for restoration and steps if a utility fails to restore public space properly (e.g., removal and failure to replace existing infrastructure);
- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the District Department of Transportation to improve coordination among utility infrastructure projects in furtherance of a “Dig Once” policy to maximize efficiencies and reduce impacts on neighborhoods, including by:
- sharing publicly the Department’s existing schedule of utility and street project coordination meetings, if any, and providing overarching calendars to communities with multiple ongoing projects;

- enhancing the proactive inspection process to ensure that utility companies and contractors are following agreed-upon schedules and procedures; and
- centering equity in coordinating these projects, as the challenges associated with large-scale and long-term utility work are heightened for neighborhoods that lack access to basic amenities.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Commission designates Commissioner Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02, Commissioner Evan Yeats, ANC 4B04, Commissioner Alison Brooks, ANC 4B08, and Commissioner Zurick T. Smith, ANC 4B03, to represent the Commission in all matters relating to this Resolution.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, in the event the designated representative Commissioners cannot carry out their representative duties for any reason, the Commission authorizes the Chair to designate another Commissioner to represent the Commission in all matters relating to this Resolution.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, consistent with DC Code § 1-309, only actions of the full Commission voting in a properly noticed public meeting have standing and carry great weight. The actions, positions, and opinions of individual commissioners, insofar as they may be contradictory to or otherwise inconsistent with the expressed position of the full Commission in a properly adopted resolution or letter, have no standing and cannot be considered as in any way associated with the Commission.

ADOPTED by voice vote at a regular public meeting (notice of which was properly given, and at which a quorum of _ members was present) on March 25, 2024, by a vote of _ yes, _ no, _ abstentions.