

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District Department of Transportation



Public Hearing on
B25-0577, the “Public Life and Activity Zones Amendment Act of 2023”
B25-0578, the “Game On: Providing Leisure Activities for Youth Amendment Act
of 2023”

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Council of the District of Columbia

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9:30 a.m.
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Good morning, Chairperson Allen, members of the Committee, staff, and District residents. My name is Matthew Marcou, Chief of Staff at the District Department of Transportation, commonly referred to as DDOT. I am here today to present testimony on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser regarding the following bills:

- B25-0577, the “Public Life and Activity Zones Amendment Act of 2023”;
- and,
- B25-0258, the “Game On: Providing Leisure Activities for Youth Amendment Act of 2023”.

Public Life and Activity Zones Amendment Act of 2023

Bill 25-0577, the “Public Life and Activity Zones Amendment Act of 2023,” seeks to establish a Public Life and Activity Zones Program within DDOT. The bill requires DDOT to designate corridors within the District that would be closed to personal vehicle traffic for a minimum of 24 daytime hours per week.

moveDC is the agency’s long-range transportation plan, and one of its goals is Enjoyable Spaces. As a part of this goal, DDOT regularly reprograms the use of public space, including closing streets to vehicular traffic to enable wide-spread pedestrian use. Our government is always considering how we can continue that work to address the District’s most pressing needs. As outlined in Mayor Bowser’s newly released Downtown Public Realm Plan, The Gallery Place Festival Plaza and the I Street Greenway are examples of street closures that could transform public space into a hub for cultural activity, connect greenspaces and create opportunities for people to explore the vibrancy of downtown.

While we agree with the goal of Council's proposed legislation, we would like to take this opportunity to note some foreseeable operational challenges.

First, DDOT has concerns around the type of corridor closure this bill outlines. Typically, under temporary street closures, MPD staffing is required and only emergency vehicles are allowed into the closed corridor. This type of closure would be unsustainable given current constraints around staff resources. Additionally, for safety reasons, we cannot allow non-emergency vehicles into a temporarily closed corridor.

Second, this bill includes language that requires DDOT to include an estimate of the reduction of miles traveled by personal vehicle within the closed corridor. This estimate would require a costly traffic modeling exercise, which DDOT is not currently equipped to perform.

Finally, the bill requires each corridor selected for closure to be at least one quarter of a mile long. DDOT seeks more latitude from Council in choosing the appropriate corridor length. The length requirement has the potential to exclude a corridor that would be an ideal initial closure. For example, 18th Street NW in Adams Morgan is only 0.2 miles long, and the F Street closure area for the Downtown Holiday Market is about 500 feet long. These are both very popular recurring street closures that generate significant pedestrian activity while not exceeding the length of one quarter mile.

Game On: Providing Leisure Activities for Youth Amendment Act of 2023

Next, I'd like to discuss Bill 25-0578, the "Game On: Providing Leisure Activities for Youth Amendment Act of 2023," which seeks to create a new permit type and process for issuing Play Street Permits. In addition, this bill requires the agency to preauthorize certain blocks for expedited street play permits.

As we previously testified, DDOT is supportive of expanding the block party permit process, to improve the delivery of block party permits for all residents seeking such approvals. We believe that through modest adjustments to the block party permit requirements, DDOT can continue to meet its goal of providing safe spaces for play without the procedural adjustments necessary to introduce a new permit category.

First, DDOT is very supportive of incorporating endorsement from Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) for public space activation permit applications. DDOT supports maintaining 51% of resident consent, as outlined in the bill, for the expedited street play permit, similar to the percentage currently required in the block party permit application while adding ANC support as an alternative. ANC support in lieu of the residential support requirement can provide greater flexibility to any residents seeking a permit.

Second, DDOT has concerns about the preauthorization period as described in the bill as neighborhood dynamics, can change quickly. We believe that this can

be addressed by allowing residents to apply for specific dates during the calendar year on the initial application, allowing greater flexibility for residents, ensuring a timely and thorough review process, and maintaining an organized and efficient use of public space.

Finally, DDOT strongly opposes any permitting structure that relies on passive approval. This has the potential to create unnecessary confusion for the public, potential safety concerns, and coordination issues with our agency partners including public safety and transit coordination. With this in mind, we cannot support a four-day, “deemed approved unless notified” expedited street play permit process. Additionally, we don’t believe this would be necessary as a part of a permit process where residents apply for predetermined dates during the initial application.

To close my testimony, I would like to reiterate DDOT’s commitment to ensuring safe, enjoyable spaces for gathering and play in the District. We look forward to collaborating with Council in achieving these and other moveDC goals. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am available to answer any questions that you may have.