FIRST-HAND OBSERVATIONS OF 18th STREET CLOSURE, JUNE 26-28, 2020

MAIN POINTS: The pilot closure of 18th Street was supposed to provide restaurants an opportunity to safely re-open in the midst of a health crisis, and to provide a “pedestrian zone” in which people could walk on 18th Street at safe social distances. Instead, the street closure created an uncontrolled opportunity for large groups of people to gather without masks, practice no social distancing, and violate ABRA rules.

- **PEDESTRIAN ZONE SUPPOSED TO ALLOW SOCIAL DISTANCING BECAME AN UNSAFE PARTY ZONE.** The so-called pedestrian path up the middle of 18th Street became a hangout with drinkers perched on the jersey barriers, not in establishments’ spaces where they were supposed to be seated and order food. Some of the establishments served them carry-out alcoholic beverages, which is not legal. Unused sections of the jersey-barri ered enclosures became unsupervised party zones. Use of masks was rare, social distancing was not practiced, and the simple rules that apply to phase 2 were not followed, nor was there any apparent attempt to enforce those rules.

- **JERSEY BARRIERS AND DIVIDERS IN FRONT OF NON-OPERATING BUSINESSES** provided people with extra spaces to socialize, drink, and hang out without dining.

- **BUS RIDERS AND RESIDENTS WERE ADVERSELY AFFECTED:** The street closure forced WMATA buses on to Kalorama Road (see photo 8) and into other detours at the expense of workers and neighborhood residents who depend on the bus lines. The Mayor's own rules for the locations of streateries state that they cannot be located on streets with Metrobus service.

**RECOMMENDATION: STREATERIES SHOULD BE PLACE IN PARKING LANES ONLY.** During the pandemic and as long as the Mayor's Emergency Orders are in place, the solution is to place the streateries in the parking lanes only, allowing two-way traffic at a low speed limit, say 10 mph. The passing vehicles would prevent people from hanging out around the outside edges of the streateries. Pick-up/drop-off zones should be installed where possible near the restaurants so that they can continue their home delivery businesses.

**RECOMMENDATION: REMOVE JERSEY BARRIERS/DIVIDERS IN FRONT OF NON-FOOD-BUSINESS TO PREVENT PARTY ZONES.** Probably 80% of the seating that was laid out as of Sunday could be maintained in just the parking lanes, creating a win-win for all and more easily enforced alcohol regulations, and definitely far better social distancing.

Please review the following photos that document these observations.
Concerns expressed by community members on the Adams Morgan listserv, responding to Denis James’ post, June 28, 2020

Original post from Denis James:

Subject: Public health concern – time to stop the 18th Street petri dish

ANC 1C, the Adams Morgan BID, and Ward One Councilmember Brianne Nadeau hatched the plan to close 18th Street to vehicular traffic, including Metrobus routes, along with developer Matt Wexler and Joe Lapan and Alisha Edmondson of Songbyrd. They sold it to the Mayor and her high agency personnel - Chief of Staff John Falcicchio, Director of Community Affairs Lamont Akins, and DDOT Director Jeff Marootian.

What has been happening Friday and Saturday nights on 18th Street in Adams Morgan could be the development of the next hotspot for spread of coronavirus. Few masks, lack of social distancing, people being in close company for extended periods of time while unmasked. Consumption of alcohol leading to relaxed inhibitions.

Many establishments with tables too close together. Space laid out with jersey barriers where there are no establishments, leading to impromptu party zones being set up. This is what was allowed to happen in Florida and Texas and now they are overwhelmed with new infections, and some of those infected will die, or infect other more vulnerable people and they will die. The rules include: all patrons to be seated in a socially distanced manner with tables 6 feet apart; face masks for everyone at an establishment except when eating or drinking; a food order must be placed for every party. No carryout alcohol - but instead, this has been widespread the last 2 nights.

Time to pull the plug today, before more people can be exposed. The much-vaunted by ANC 1C pedestrian passageway up the middle of the street is just more room to party. Check out the photos. They were taken during 2 walks each night through the closed area.

Denis James, President Kalorama Citizens Association 202 705-7411 (photos attached)

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Doralee Halperin, 3:22 pm, 6-28-2020

I do not want to become involved in a back and forth on this but I will say that my husband and I took a walk down 18th Street on Friday evening and we were troubled by the continued lack of mask wearing by far too many people and the lack of social distancing. We attempted to figure out what table might be best (safest) to sit at if we wanted to dine out and came to the conclusion there wasn’t one. We will continue to isolate as much as possible and wear masks whenever we go out. Yes, this pandemic is a hardship for everyone but I’ll eat at home for 4,5,6 more months if that’s what it takes for us to put end to at least the first wave of the pandemic. We are nowhere near the end.

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Charles S. Koppelman-Milstein, 3:44 pm, 6-28-2020

I was definitely in favor of this before its launch, but implementation has been terrible. I agree with Denis here. There were an incredible number of people without masks throughout the neighborhood, on and around 18th. There was no enforcement of masks or distancing, neither from police, DOH nor businesses. I was disappointed in my neighbors and the businesses we are gifting public space to.
There’s not more than 20 people in any of these photos, and everyone is in a group that is socially distanced for other groups. You don’t want to lose parking spaces, we get it, but don’t pretend like this is what you’re actually upset about.

Janet Kubalak 3:44 pm, 6-28-2020
Luke, are you serious? Most of those people in the photographs are nowhere near 6 ft apart nor are they wearing masks. They appear to be primarily an under-35 crowd, a group that while likely to catch and spread covid-19, is least likely to die from it. Many of the rest of us in the neighborhood are much more vulnerable.

Jim Thompson, 4:26 pm, 6-28-2020
Lots to consider here and I sympathize with all parties concerned. I think there’s a disconnect between the city and local BID as BID is saying one thing and ABRA another. You have to admit that it feels and seems really strange - and arguably irresponsible - to be inviting people to mass assemble and consume alcohol during an international pandemic and pretend things are kinda normal even though our numbers are down right now. I’m inclined to think that advocating for alternative and public funding and support might be a better use of our time and resources.

S.K. 4:37 pm, 6-28-2020
Agree. Also, re community need and some good actions, like donating unwanted bicycles to those who can’t afford them in different parts of the city, maybe include a printout about the importance of social distancing, wearing face masks, etc. Without this effort, then this misery and nightmare of the virus will be with us longer than necessary and the extra need for community aid will be increased. We need to work towards containment. We can’t do that without the majority of people onboard.

Jean Stewart 5:23 pm, 6-28-2020
I don’t see people seated at a restaurant in these pictures. I see people standing in large groups, no masks, no social distancing. The only good part is that it is outside, not in closed bar spaces like I have seen in photos in Texas, Florida, Arizona, etc. Do any of these young, white party-goers have any concern for people of color, people they may know (or be related to) who are older, and/or have underlying conditions like asthma or diabetes? If this party zone is continued on other than weekend nights, the workers who need to ride the 18th St. buses will have to take longer to get to and from work. But then they are mostly lower-income folks, mostly without health insurance or paid sick leave, so they are of little concern to the carefree crowds who only risk a little flu-like illness, not time on a ventilator. I’m fortunate in that I’m retired, and I can keep my older, diabetic self away from this dangerous (to me) environment.
Chris Warner, 5:48 pm, 6-28-2020
This experiment has failed. Next

Mary Belcher, 6:10 pm, 6-28-2020
The photos speak for themselves. It’s Myrtle Beach on 18th Street. And next weekend is July 4th.

Richard Ehrenberg, 7:32 pm, 6-28-2020
As predicted. I tried to sound the warning that this so called "pilot program" was I'll timed but nothing stops the mythical "consensus". Tragic disregard of others health. Look at the numbers, everywhere in the U.S. where the reopening has been rushed there is a rapid rise in infection. So, a pathetic bow to the selfish developer interests. Remember It's Adams-Morgan, not ADMO, and it's about people, not just a catchy brand name.

Lauryn Beer, 8:49 pm, 6-28-2020
This was an incredibly ill thought out idea. 18th Street last night looked like Florida with all the attendant irresponsibility. This was entirely predictable. To conduct this experiment in the middle of a pandemic, when DC didn't even meet its own metrics before moving to phase two, is beyond reckless. I am not looking forward to the spike of infections on my doorstep that is inevitable is this lunacy continues.