

Dangerous Traffic Safety Conditions and Urgent Request for Actions
Forest Hills, NW Washington, DC

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Cc: Councilmember Cheh, Ward 3
Robert Deyling, Chair, Streets and Sidewalks Committee for ANC 3F
Tony Donaldson, Liaison, Ward 3, Mayor's Office of Community Relations and Services
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ANC 3F Commissioners

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1. Introduction

As ANC Commissioner for single-member district 3F03, this request for action is submitted at the urging and on behalf of the residents of the Forest Hills neighborhood in Ward 3, upper Northwest, Washington, DC.¹ I have been Commissioner for just over one year and, during that time, the issue raised more often than any other is the increasingly dangerous conditions that pedestrians and bikers face in light of high traffic volumes and reckless driving on Forest Hills. I regularly receive emails and phone calls from residents who have just experienced or witnessed a near fatal incident. As an example, just a couple of months, two cars speeding through a busy, blind bend were involved in a head-on collision on the 2800 block of Davenport Street. I hear from parents who cannot let their children walk or bike to school or to the Forest Hills Playground because there is no sidewalk on which to walk safely. I receive complaints from those who reside near over-trafficked intersections because they are frustrated with drivers who routinely ignore stop signs with impunity. I talk to pedestrians, joggers and bikers who are worried about their safety because of speeding drivers who regularly disregard the 20 MPH

¹ All roads referred to throughout this document are located in Northwest, Washington, DC.

speed limit² that applies throughout the neighborhood. The road infrastructure in Forest Hills, including the lack of sidewalks throughout the neighborhood, overwhelmingly favors vehicular traffic over other environmentally-friendly modes of transportation and road use. The result is local roads carrying heavier vehicular volumes than is safe. Pedestrians and bicyclists are at risk while drivers feel free or emboldened to speed, run stop signs, hop low curbs, swerve around pedestrians, honk at blind curves . . . the list could go on and on.

This document details dangerous traffic safety conditions identified by residents of Forest Hills and urges DDOT and the Mayor’s office to take swift and effective action to address enforcement and calming measures before the District of Columbia experiences yet another accident or fatality due to reckless driving, lack of safe walking routes, or poorly configured intersections. Specifically, the most dangerous conditions and streets that experience excessive vehicular volumes and speeding are identified in Section 4 below. For each of the four locations identified in Section 4, immediate and specific traffic calming measures are urged.

2. Background

The neighborhood of Forest Hills is situated on the east side of Connecticut Avenue, south of Chevy Chase, DC and north of Cleveland Park. It is bordered by Broad Branch Road on the east and Connecticut Avenue on the west – both major arteries utilized by commuters, including those from Maryland who drive to and from work in the District.

Neighborhood residents report that traffic conditions have become increasingly unsafe in recent years, particularly for pedestrians and bikers, for numerous reasons, in particular the following:

- (1) Personal navigation software diverts drivers from main thoroughfares into residential streets;
- (2) An increase in cut-through traffic during rush hours due to DDOT’s decision to eliminate the reversible lanes on Connecticut Avenue, beginning in 2020 and, as announced by Mayor Bowser³, the permanent conversion of the far east and west lanes of Connecticut Avenue to bike lanes; and
- (3) The closure of Beach Drive during the pandemic emergency and the Council’s request to make the closure permanent, which has resulted in significantly higher vehicle through-put on Brandywine and Davenport Streets.

On Wednesday, September 29, 2021, Christian Pineiro and Tony Donaldson (both copied here) participated in a meeting and walk-around with several residents of Forest Hills. They listened to the concerns of those who live on the streets most impacted by the factors listed above and

² <https://ddot.dc.gov/page/twenty-mph-20-mph-default-speed-limit-frequently-asked-questions>

³ <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-chooses-new-design-connecticut-avenue-nw-repurposing-reversible-rush-hour-lanes>

saw first-hand the physical conditions that have resulted in increasingly unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bikers in Forest Hills. Both Mr. Pineiro and Mr. Donaldson examined the localities listed in Section 4 below and support the requests for swift implementation of measures that will mitigate the safety risks to pedestrians, bikers and even other drivers.

3. Public Policy Support

In February 2015, Mayor Bowser’s office announced the Vision Zero initiative, a program intended to eliminate traffic fatalities and injuries by 2024⁴. In the six years that have followed, the goals of Vision Zero have not been realized and, in fact, 2021 was the deadliest year for traffic-related injuries and fatalities in over a decade.⁵ Ultimately, Vision Zero has been ineffective because the initiative has failed to address the root of dangerous traffic safety issues – streets that prioritize vehicle speed and volume.

The nature of the traffic safety issues in Forest Hills are not unique and have been addressed in other areas of the city facing similar problems. Several years ago, the Kent Corner neighborhood in ANC 3D was experiencing a high volume of cut-through traffic and reckless driving on local streets. In 2017, DDOT designated the area bounded by MacArthur Boulevard, Loughboro Road, and Arizona Avenue as a Neighborhood Slow Zone. It also presented a phased plan which included “DO NOT ENTER” signs and restrictions during the morning peak period (7:00 am – 9:30 am) and “NO RIGHT TURN” signs and restrictions for the afternoon peak period (4:00 pm – 6:30 pm) in its Phase 1 Improvements for several streets that served as cut-through access to the neighborhood. While those measures have not eliminated all traffic risks, they have been highly effective in reducing the likelihood of injuries and fatalities by re-routing through-traffic to roadways rated for heavier traffic.

This paper urges the implementation of measures that will address the dangerous conditions created by high volumes and high-speed cut-through traffic in Forest Hills. Each traffic calming and compliance measure urgently requested in this document is essential to reaching the goals of Vision Zero and is supported by the Mayor’s announcement of funding⁶ for road safety improvements and commitment to expediting the implementation of measures that address dangerous traffic safety conditions.⁷ Ignoring or even delaying these measures directly contravenes the public safety goals of the Mayor’s Vision Zero initiative.

⁴ <https://waba.org/blog/2015/02/mayor-bowser-commits-to-implementing-vision-zero/>.

⁵ <https://ggwash.org/view/81085/after-six-years-of-failure-its-time-to-start-over-on-vision-zero;>
<https://www.washingtoninformer.com/vision-zero-not-working-anc-commissioner-says/>.

⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/05/12/dc-road-safety/>.

⁷ <https://ddot.dc.gov/page/vision-zero-summer-safety-road-trip>.

4. High Priority Traffic Safety Concerns and Proposed Calming Measures

A. Forest Hills

High volumes of vehicular, cut-through traffic in Forest Hills creates dangerous conditions for pedestrians, bikers and drivers throughout the neighborhood. Excessive traffic, coupled with the lack of sidewalks and other safety infrastructure, has created unsafe conditions leading to collisions and near-misses involving pedestrians and bicyclists. As described in sub-sections B through D below, Davenport Street, Brandywine Street, Fessenden Street, and Linnean Avenue are the areas most urgently in need of measures to reduce volumes and calm traffic. Almost all roadways in Forest Hills are designated as “Local Streets” but handle much higher volumes of vehicular traffic.⁸ For example, vehicular traffic volumes traversing Davenport and Brandywine Streets far exceed intended limits planned for Local Streets and have been documented at more than 7,000 cars per day, according to a 2021 DDOT study.⁹ The vast majority of cut-through traffic enters and exits Forest Hills using one of three streets: Davenport Street, Brandywine Street, and 27th Street.

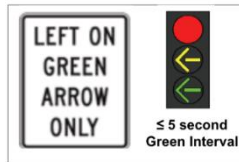
High volumes of vehicular, cut-through traffic increasingly crowd out other modes of transportation such as walking and biking, and limit access to schools and parks for children. The Local Streets in Forest Hills are important conduits for non-vehicular traffic including pedestrian and bicycle traffic headed west to Murch Elementary School, Deal Middle School, Wilson High School, Franklin Montessori School, Burke and Sheridan Schools, and the University of the District of Columbia, as well as to Forest Hills Park and Fort Reno Park. Forest Hills is also an important conduit for pedestrian and bicycle traffic headed East to enter hiking, biking, picnic, and other recreational areas of Rock Creek Park. Despite the importance of these Local Streets to non-vehicular traffic, roadway infrastructure prioritizes vehicular traffic over the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists in the area.

⁸ The roadway network in the District of Columbia is arrayed into a system of categories that represent the use and function of each street. This system is called the Functional Classification of Streets. The functional categories range from Principal Arterials, which are major traffic carriers in the city, to Local Streets, which serve predominantly local traffic and carry little to no through traffic. The primary reason for these classifications is to assure that street improvement funds are allocated in a manner that ensures that those streets that are most important in maintaining the daily flow of people and goods throughout the city are given priority for construction funding. The classifications also play an important role in traffic planning. A goal of traffic planning is to funnel as much traffic as possible onto the major arteries in the city and discourage traffic from using the narrow neighborhood streets that comprise the major portion of the city network. The classification system details the extent to which streets are functioning as traffic carriers and is therefore used as a framework for planning such improvements as traffic signalization channelizations and various sign and pavement marking details. These classifications can be used in determining which streets are candidates for traffic restraints.

⁹ DDOT classifies “Local Streets” as roads intended for no more than 2,000 vehicles of average daily traffic (ADT).

Urgent Actions Requested

- **Redirect cut-through traffic back onto streets rated for higher vehicular volume.**
 - 1) Restrict the volume of vehicular traffic during morning peak periods making the left turn off Military Road onto Ridge Road with a “LEFT ON GREEN ARROW ONLY” sign and left turn signal with a 5-second green light interval:



Prevent drivers from using 27th Street as a secondary cut-through by installing a “NO LEFT TURN” at 27th Street and Military Road.

- 2) Restrict the volume of vehicular traffic during afternoon peak periods making the right turn onto Military Road from Ridge Road with a “NO TURN ON RED” sign and adjust the green light interval of the traffic signal to 5-seconds (from the current 30-seconds):



- 3) Install a “DO NOT ENTER” sign and restrictions during the morning peak period (7:00 – 9:00 am) at Davenport Street and Broad Branch Road:



- 4) Install a “DO NOT ENTER” sign and restrictions during the afternoon peak period (4:00 – 6:30 pm) at Grant Road and Broad Branch Road.



- 5) Replace the old speed limit signs in Forest Hills with signs that reflect the new 20 MPH speed limit such as this one:¹⁰



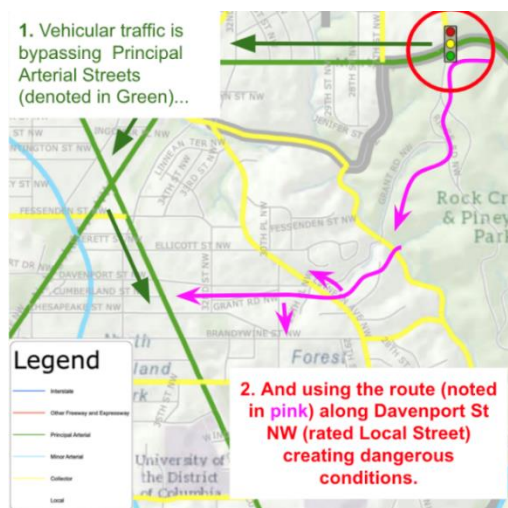
¹⁰ New speed limit signs have been posted on various Local Streets in upper NW DC.

B. Davenport Street

The 2800 block of Davenport Street NW has a documented history of dangerous road conditions but continues to handle heavy volumes of fast-moving vehicular traffic.

Davenport is rated as a Local Street by DDOT but handles more than 150% the maximum vehicular traffic designated for such streets, according to DDOT traffic studies from 2021 and 2016.¹¹ The 2800 block of Davenport has a documented history of dangerous conditions, including an “F” rating and a head-on collision involving two cars in September of 2021.¹² In fact, a 2013 DDOT traffic study was halted “due to safety concerns for the analysts” monitoring traffic on the road. During the morning rush hour, Davenport handles the majority of cut-through vehicular traffic bypassing the Westbound Military Avenue to Connecticut Avenue commuter route, both streets of which are designated as Principal Arterial Streets. On weekday afternoons, Davenport, Brandywine, and 27th St NW are used by after-school and rush-hour traffic for the same cut-through purposes in the Eastbound direction. The schematic below shows the flows of cut-through traffic through Davenport and other nearby roadways.

Cut-Through Traffic Through Forest Hills Along Davenport Street



¹¹ Broad Branch Road Environmental Assessment Update (2021). DDOT.
<http://broadbranchrdea.com/projectupdatepresentation.html>

¹² Broad Branch Road Rehabilitation Environmental Assessment (2013). DDOT.

Urgent Actions Requested

- 1) Install two speed cameras (one in each direction) indicating "YOUR SPEED" against the posted 15 MPH limit.
- 2) Narrow the roadway and install pedestrian and bicycle friendly alternatives, such as pedestrian islands, at critical junctures to control speed and allow for safe crossing/passage of non-vehicular traffic (pedestrian/bike).
- 3) Add multi-modal infrastructure to improve access to schools and parks to ensure safety and goals. DDOT should prioritize safe passage for all modes of transportation: pedestrians, bikers and vehicles alike. To meet this critical goal, the District should replace the existing narrow, low walking path, with a traditional sidewalk on Davenport and add a dedicated bike lane.

C. **Brandywine Street**

Vehicles crossing the intersection of Brandywine Street and Linnean Avenue regularly speed through the stop signs at this busy four-way intersection.

The highly-trafficked four-way intersection of Brandywine Street and Linnean Avenue poses an extreme hazard to pedestrians and bikers because vehicles routinely ignore the posted stop signs, often at high speeds. This intersection experiences an exceptionally large volume of vehicular traffic travelling in the east-west direction between Broad Branch Road and Connecticut Avenue, and in the north-south direction over Linnean Avenue, which, as discussed in Section D below, is a major north-south artery in the Forest Hills neighborhood. Citizens who cross this intersection on foot or bike regularly contend with vehicles that not only fail to come to a complete stop at the posted stop signs, but also race through the intersection at speeds well above the posted limit of 25 MPH (which was recently reduced to 20 MPH). The volume of cut-through traffic has been steadily increasing over the years and, with it, the risk of traffic-related injuries and fatalities has reached dangerous levels.

Urgent Actions Requested

- (1) Install stop sign cameras on the 2800 and 2700 blocks of Brandywine Street in the east/west direction and paint the appropriate white cross lines to indicate stop points to drivers.
- (2) Replace the existing, faded stop signs with new brighter signs that have reflective qualities.
- (3) Paint wide crosswalks with highly visible paint and ensure clear sight lines from 25 yards or greater.

It is worth noting that, when the intersection is monitored by MPD officers, they constantly issue tickets given the number of offenders who travel at high speeds through the intersection without stopping. Recognizing that daily monitoring by MPD officers is not a tenable long-term solution, implementation of mitigation measures as soon as possible is critical to ensuring the safety of pedestrians and bikers who cross the intersection daily.

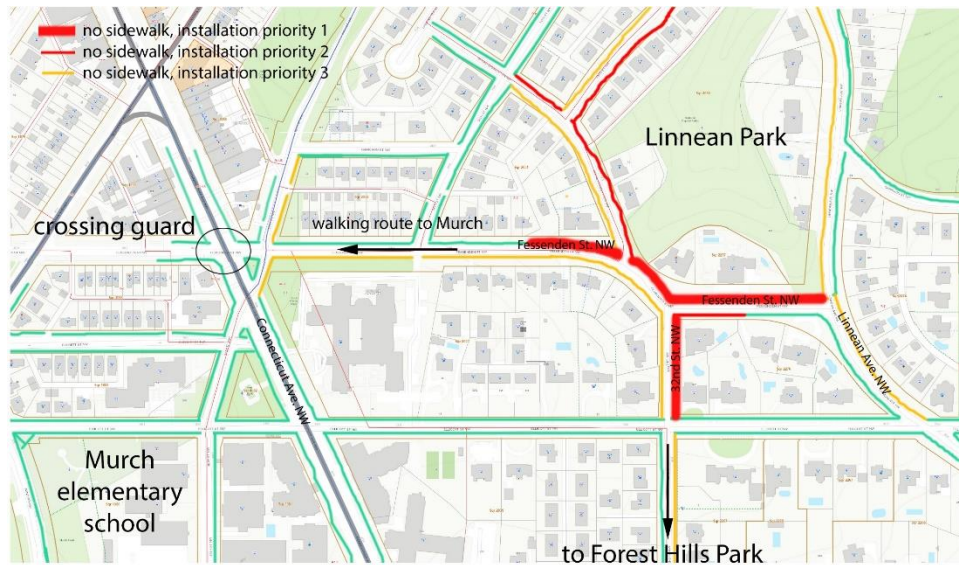
D. Fessenden Street

The absence of sidewalks on heavily-traveled segments of Fessenden Street and on busy nearby streets results in road dangerous conditions.

The portion of Fessenden Street that extends from the east side of Connecticut Avenue to meet Linnean Avenue experiences high volumes of local and through traffic, so the lack of sidewalks has created dangerous travel conditions for pedestrians and bikers. Residents have repeatedly requested the installation of sidewalks over the years, but those requests have gone ignored.

Fessenden Street and Neighboring Roadways

The streets identified with a red line in the figure below do not have a sidewalk on either side of the road. The portions of Fessenden Street and 32nd Street identified by **thick red** lines are frequently used by children walking to Murch Elementary School, the Forest Hills Playground, and Linnean Park.



Per DC Code §9-425.01 (text provided below), the installation of sidewalks along the route identified by the thick red line in the map above is supported by the conditions described in both sections (a) and (b) of the Code. Accordingly, the District's failure to install a sidewalk contravenes both the text of §9-425.01 *and* the underlying public safety goals of the law.

§ 9-425.01. Sidewalk installation requirements.

(a) For road segments that lack sidewalks on both sides of the street, road reconstruction, installation of a curb and gutter, or curb and gutter replacement shall include installation of a sidewalk on at least one side of the street.

(b) For roadways that are missing sidewalks, but are not undergoing major construction, sidewalk installation shall be prioritized for the following areas:

- (1) Missing sidewalks in school areas;
- (2) Routes that provide access to parks and recreational facilities;
- (3) Transit stops;
- (4) Locations where the absence of a sidewalk creates substantial pedestrian safety risks;

and

(5) Roadway segments for which residents petitioned to have sidewalks.

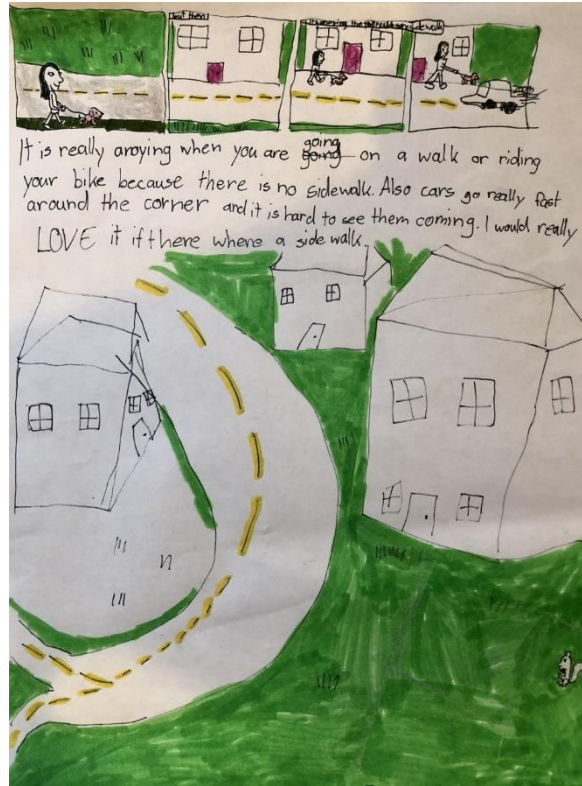
(c) The Mayor shall continue to accept and consider sidewalk petition requests from residents.

One resident who has lived in the neighborhood for several years recalls a scary day in September 2016 when he and his five-year-old twin children were nearly hit by a car on the 3100 block of Fessenden Street while walking to Politics and Prose Bookstore. Shortly after this incident, he called DDOT's traffic safety office relay the incident and describe the dangerous conditions posed by the absence of sidewalks on Fessenden Street. He was told that the city had filed his request for action and that he would get a response within 100 days. He has heard nothing back from DDOT and has called every year since 2016, to no avail. Since that time, several houses (house numbers 3301, 3303, 3107, and 3240) on Fessenden have been substantially renovated or entirely rebuilt, yet the city has not required the installation of sidewalks pursuant to §9-425.01(a). Angry and frustrated residents have discussed a petition pursuant to §9-425.01(c) to appeal to Mayor Bowser to install sidewalks before someone is seriously injured or another traffic-related fatality occurs.

Without sidewalks, pedestrians are forced to navigate their interactions with vehicles, and scenes like the ones below are commonplace.



Finally, a plea by one of the youngest residents explains why sidewalks are critical to pedestrian safety:



Urgent Actions Requested

Based on the conditions described above, the following immediate actions are requested:

- (1) Install sidewalks on the 3100 block of Fessenden Street.
- (2) Install sidewalks on the 4900 block of 32nd Street.

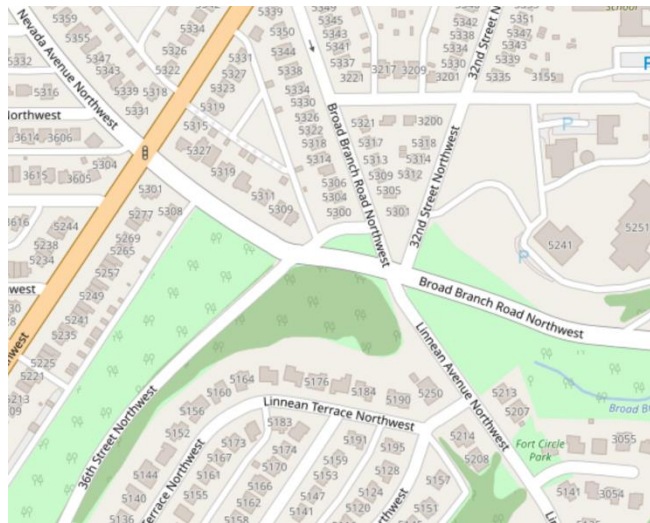
E. Linnean Avenue

High volumes of local, commuter and commercial traffic travel at high speeds and in blatant disregard of stop signs along Linnean Avenue.

The northern portion of Linnean Avenue extends from Broad Branch Road on the north to Albemarle Street on the south.¹³ The north end of Linnean Avenue terminates at the intersection of five feeder streets carrying traffic to and from Maryland and the Chevy Chase, DC neighborhood.

- Broad Branch Road crosses Linnean Avenue and continues northbound. Just a few hundred feet east of that intersection, 27th Street carries commuter traffic from the very heavily traveled Military Road, down to Broad Branch Road, and from there, west to Linnean Avenue, Nevada Avenue, and 36th Street.
- At the same intersection of Broad Branch Road and Linnean Avenue, 32nd Street (in a one-way southbound portion) carries commuter traffic onto Linnean Avenue from Military Road.
- Furthermore, at this intersection, Nevada Avenue carries traffic to and from Chevy Chase, DC and Maryland, while 36th Street carries traffic to and from Connecticut Avenue.

Northern Terminus of Linnean Avenue



Because of the multiple feeder streets at the north terminus, residents, pedestrians and bikers along Linnean Avenue experience high traffic flow rates, particularly during

¹³ The southern portion of Linnean Avenue, between the south rim of Soapstone Valley and Tilden Street, is not discussed in this document.

commuter rush hours. In addition, Linnean Avenue serves as an artery for commercial traffic and service providers driving to or passing through Forest Hills.

Over the years, residents of Linnean Avenue have voiced concerns about the increasing number of vehicles that drive at excessively high speeds and often ignore stop signs. Except for casual and short-lived observations by DDOT and MPD, requests by residents to study the dangerous conditions and implement traffic calming measures along Linnean Avenue have gone ignored. In early 2019, MPD placed a “speed trailer” on Linnean Avenue for a few days, moving it to various spots between Broad Branch Road and Albemarle Street. MPD also occasionally patrols the area. No other concerted study or safety improvement initiatives have occurred to address the dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bikers on Linnean Avenue.

Urgent Actions Requested

- (1) Immediately install a three-way stop sign at the intersection of Linnean Avenue and Fessenden Street. Currently, there is only one stop sign (on Fessenden), which does not prevent drivers from speeding through the intersection at Linnean.
- (2) Immediately mark all intersections of Linnean Avenue between Broad Branch Road and Albemarle Street with crosswalk striping and clear signage indicating pedestrian crossings.
- (3) Immediately install electronic signage along both the northbound and southbound stretches of Linnean Avenue, midway between Garrison Street and Harrison Street, to inform drivers of their speed in relation to the posted speed limits.
- (4) Immediately install additional speed limit signage along the long and winding stretch of Linnean. Currently, there are critical segments, such as the stretch between Fessenden Street and Linnean Terrace, where there is only one speed limit sign.
- (5) Undertake an expedited traffic safety investigation (TSI) to determine the need for additional stop-signs, speed cameras, and warning devices for traffic calming purposes.
- (6) Undertake an expedited TSI to determine the feasibility of constructing sidewalks along (i) the west side of Linnean Avenue between Broad Branch Road and Fessenden Street; (ii) the east side of Linnean Avenue between Fessenden Street and Ellicott Street; and (iii) the east side of Linnean Avenue between 30th Street and Davenport Street.

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