

**Committee on Transportation & the Environment, DC City Council**

Performance Oversight Hearing, Tuesday, February 27, 2018



Photo:  
Scott Kelly  
Via NASA

**RMA Statement on Street Light Modernization Project**

**THE DISTRICT APPEARS TO BE OVERLIT** compared to the suburbs. This is justified as deterring crime and improving traffic safety. We question whether very bright lighting inside the city boundary corresponds to lower crime and/or fewer accidents compared to adjacent suburban areas.

**THE CITY COUNCIL WILL REVIEW a contract to replace all 71,000 District street lights**, to be proposed later this spring by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT).

**THE MERITS ARE OBVIOUS** for transitioning to power-saving Light Emitting Diode (LED) street lights and advanced wiring; a new system can provide many other modern services our city needs.

**BUT WE HAVE CONCERNS:**

- The proposed contract term of 15 years is way too long in this fast-moving field of technology; Los Angeles' first phase of conversion to LEDs was for 5 years, for example.
- High intensity blue light from LEDs is harmful to human health and creates road hazards, per the American Medical Association.<sup>1</sup> Such bright light is harmful to insects and wildlife. It ruins the character of historic, residential and commercial streets. The city needs evidence that planned LED lights will help not hurt our health and safety.
- Council Member Mary Cheh requested a DDOT moratorium on installing high intensity blue-white 4,000 Kelvin lights, at a May 2017 roundtable. But since, the agency has installed these.
- DDOT's Infrastructure Project Management Division (IPMD) proposes to relight the entirety of historic Massachusetts Avenue in a big infrastructure project, "MARP," scheduled for contract awards this spring and construction in FY 2018-2019. The MARP lights would be chosen and

installed way ahead of the city-wide contract the Council will consider.

- Restore Mass Ave's Historic Landscape Initiative, based on its award-winning guide,<sup>2</sup> is actively preserving the part of Massachusetts Avenue NW known as Embassy Row as an ensemble of fine architecture, open public landscape and rows of maturing trees. The Grand Avenue is now lit by High Pressure Sodium lamps of soft, amber-white color. MARP-proposes 3000 Kelvin LEDs that will glare. RMA wants all street lamps to be warm-white of 2700 Kelvin. Below please find RMA Board Resolution of Nov. 27 and its Jan. 8 Position Paper sent to the Mayor and City Council.
- RMA is very alarmed about the MARP's impact on the full rows street trees along the route. This canopy including other trees has grown by 13% in RMA's 10 years of effort. We urge that light poles be placed to minimize tree pruning; also to minimize pruning, lights should be low as possible.
- Tree-friendly light fixtures should be required by the proposed city contract, so the modernization helps, and does not set back, the Mayor's goal of expanding city tree canopy to 40% by 2032.

#### SUMMARY

Restore Mass Ave, and many individuals and partner organizations in Wards 2 and 3, urge these concerns be addressed, not only to retain the tree canopy and historic character of Embassy Row, but to achieve a better lighting city wide.

We all need future photos of our city from space to show a different picture!

Deborah Shapley, President & Jane Simchak, Secretary  
For the Board of Directors, Restore Mass Ave

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#### **RMA Actions on Street Light Modernization**

In cooperation with DC Street Light Task Force

Board Resolution Nov 27, 2017 "Restore Mass Ave recommends that the D.C. Department of Transportation adopt warm-white 2700 Kelvin LED lights for all street light installations in the District."

Position Paper on MARP Jan 8, 2018, from RMA, SKNC, SKHA sent to Evans, Mary Cheh, Jack Evans, the Mayor, ANCs 2B, 2D and 3C and leaders of the DDOT MARP project. Attached.

**Issue #4 LIGHTING** *The proposed, new street lighting threatens tree canopy and the historic nature of the Avenue.*

- We believe that high tree canopies cannot thrive when branches are cut to accommodate the planned lighting.
- Moreover, the 4,000 Kelvin (K) or 3,000 K LED bulbs that DDOT plans are too blue and harsh. Residents and travelers along an historic avenue do not need or want "soccer field lights." The American Medical Association has reported on the health effects of such strong lights and recommends the lowest possible light levels. Given these concerns, Restore Mass Ave will be joining the District Street Light Task Force, which has brought together many neighborhood groups to influence DC policy on street lights."

Evening Street Light Tour Feb 21, 2018 – Slideshow [Restoremassave.org/partnering-with-the-city/](http://Restoremassave.org/partnering-with-the-city/)

1/ <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama-adopts-guidance-reduce-harm-high-intensity-street-lights>

2/ *A Grand Avenue Revival: Massachusetts Avenue Landscape History & Design Guide*, RMA (2014)  
<http://RestoreMassAve.org/grand-avenue-revival-book/>

Celebrating **10** years and **13%** tree canopy growth