

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Transportation and Environment
Council Member Charles Allen, Chair
DDOT Performance Oversight Hearing Fiscal Year 2023-2024
February 9, 2024



Statement on MARP - Restore Mass Ave President Deborah Shapley

Chairman Allen and the Committee, thank you for chance to testify today.

Our statement focuses on the “Streetscape” portion of the DDOT Budget. Our purpose is to share Restore Mass Ave’s detailed experience over five years with just one of these projects for which we tried to protect trees; today we raise the question of whether the more than \$1 billion of these DDOT projects under way **lowers the number and health of trees our city badly needs** to reverse its declining tree canopy.

Restore Mass Ave’s mission is to regrow the full canopy of major trees that once thrived along the two miles of Massachusetts Avenue NW, now known as Embassy Row. We have been planting trees and arranging care for 18 years. Our focus is local tree care by embassies and US owners.

The Zoom background behind me shows a row of elms we planted with the Cote d’Ivoire Embassy in 2009; you see the crowd last May enjoying the cool air and beauty they provide.

Mass Ave is a major arterial commuter route. In terms of policy it’s like Georgia or Rhode Island Avenues. So we choose projects that can be models elsewhere.

Canopy in our project area grew 13% in our first 10 years, 2006-2016. But in 2017 one mile of the route was targeted for ‘rehabilitation’ by DDOT. The



Massachusetts Avenue Rehabilitation Project (MARP), under the Infrastructure Projects Management Division (IPMD), was a \$23 million project; Milani LLC was prime contractor. Besides this full dig of roadway & sidewalks, replacing lights, storm drains, etc. Washington Gas showed up. “Project Pipes” began digging the street bed and lawn areas to replace 70 year-old gas lines at the same time!

These combined projects from 2017 to 2023 became the most photographed, monitored road project in the city, I am sure. Our power points and web page now at <https://restoremassave.org/marp/> tell some of the saga.

RMA’s “Campaign for Shade” to protect trees had the support of local civic groups and ANCs, private arborists frustrated with DDOT and the utilities, and local neighbors. You are invited to view the [slide presentation](#) to the interagency Urban Forestry advisory Council last April.

We are concerned that, with current rules and practice, trees near \$1 billion worth public streetscape projects are at risk. It doesn’t have to happen!

Two features of our Campaign to note:

One was the **novel Observer App**. We put signs on the fences Milani put around street trees. Our signs had a QR code. Anyone passing could hold up their phone and use our app page to report an issue. Our Hub forwarded the message to Washington Gas, Urban Forestry or IPMD leaders as needed.

A second feature is **Embassy Row’s many Heritage and Special Trees**. We have many maturing trees being nurtured by local owners here. We will request the GIS land cover maps for 2020, 2025 and later years to assess the impact on canopy long-term both in the MARP work zone and nearby.

DDOT, including the Urban Forestry Division, responded well to some of our expert recommendations. We want to share the good precedents. For example, in

light of this morning's discussion of uneven, unsafe sidewalks, I note that sections of the new sidewalk on Mass Ave were redone with "Flexipave." This product helps larger tree roots to grow and it's soft and smooth so you trip less.

But the jury's out and we're worried. On balance \$1 billion worth of DDOT road rehabilitation projects are likely lowering tree canopy. Damage happens during construction and later by trees' early decline and death.

We recommend that DDOT begin including pre-construction canopy maps, firm commitments on canopy change, and follow-up surveys. This would get accountability to contractors, public agencies and utilities to limit the damage. It could be tied to a rating system for contractor/utility project performance; the tree protection rating on a project could be used in scoring future bids.

When Council Member Mary Cheh was chair of this Committee, she was interested in our requests, such as to lower the hot 3000 Kelvin streetlights along the Mass Ave arterial, so lights can be less on other arterials. Ward 2 Council Member Brooke Pinto is active with DDOT on RMA tree and infrastructure issues.

We request a meeting with the Transportation and Environment Committee staff to present the lessons learned during the MARP reconstruction. Also we plan to share our recommendations with others on the front lines of this small project to achieve shared recommendations that can be used city-wide.

On behalf of the RMA Board and others in the green community here, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

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