ANC 3/4G Resolution
Regarding DDOT's January 9, 2017
Notice of Intent for Changes to the
Intersection at 39th Street NW and Reno Road

Summary: The Reno Road/Ingomar/39th Street intersection is notoriously dangerous, and urgent action is required to make it safer. DDOT's preferred solution -- making 39th Street one-way northbound -- will not address all aspects of the problem, however, because it does nothing to protect pedestrians, bicyclists, or vehicles crossing Reno Road heading north. DDOT's approach will shift traffic to other streets with adverse consequences. While some vegetation could be trimmed to improve sight lines, a four-way stop, coupled with compliance measures on Reno Road, will provide the only assured resolution. DDOT's rationale for rejecting this more comprehensive option is inconsistent with the use of four-way stops at analogous intersections. ANC 3/4G urges DDOT to protect pedestrians and drivers by installing a four-way stop, removing vegetation if necessary, and implementing enforcement measures.

ANC 3/4G has received extensive community input from multiple publicly noticed meetings, from neighborhood meetings, and from emails and posts on the community listserv. As a result, the ANC has established the following facts:

1. Many accidents have occurred at the intersection of 39th Street, Reno Road, and Ingomar Street, leading DDOT to conclude that this intersection creates serious safety concerns and requires improvements.

2. The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) crash database that DDOT relied on for its analysis shows that between 2012 and 2015, an equal number of accidents involved vehicles heading north on 39th Street across Reno Road as those involving vehicles heading sound on 39th Street across Reno Road.

3. The sight line for cars approaching Reno Road southbound on 39th Street is largely obstructed by two large trees and several shrubs located in public space and by a crest on Reno Road so that drivers cannot see cars coming from the left on Reno Road and drivers on Reno Road cannot see cars traveling north on 39th Street until they are into the intersection.

4. Pedestrians -- including students from Deal, Wilson, Murch and Blessed Sacrament -- attempting to cross Reno Road at this intersection have difficulty because cars on Reno Road rarely stop at the crosswalk, and there is no crosswalk with any traffic control between Military Road and Fessenden Street.

5. DDOT participated in two joint public meetings with ANC 3E and ANC 3/4G in April and September 2016, to discuss and present ideas on how to make this intersection safer, and DDOT met with commissioners and the community at ANC 3/4G's January 23, 2017 meeting.

6. At the September 2016 meeting, DDOT discussed four potential options: (1) no action, (2) making 39th Street one-way northbound in the block before Reno Road; (3) installing a four-way stop at the intersection; and (4) installing a traffic signal at the intersection.

7. Because taking no action at this dangerous intersection would be irresponsible, that option has not been examined in any detail.

8. On January 9, 2017, DDOT issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) recommending the following actions and requesting comments by February 28, 2017 (later extended until March 6):

   a. Convert 39th Street NW between Reno Road and Jenifer Street NW to one-way northbound;

   b. Remove on-street parking on the west side of 39th Street NW between Reno Road and Jenifer Street NW to allow for the installation of a contra-flow bike lane;

   c. Convert Ingomar Street NW between 39th Street and Reno Road NW to one-way eastbound;

   d. Convert the intersection of 39th Street and Jenifer Street NW from two-way to all-way stop control;

   e. Remove on-street parking on the north side of Jenifer Street NW between 39th Street and Reno Road NW to accommodate an expected increase in vehicle trips on this segment; and

   f. Install additional signing and marking improvements, including high-visibility crosswalks.

9. If 39th Street between Jennifer and Reno Road were made one-way northbound, southbound traffic will be diverted east and west onto very narrow Jenifer Street, which is also a designated neighborhood bikeway.

10. For drivers who attempt to detour to the west around the proposed one-way portion of 39th Street, the sight lines at the intersection of Reno Road and Jenifer Street are also partially obstructed by trees both to the left and right, and drivers approaching Reno Road must look to the left at a difficult acute angle in an effort to see oncoming traffic.

11. Drivers attempting to detour to the east around the proposed one-way portion of 39th Street to reach Reno Road via 38th Street will have to access Reno Road at the complex and potentially hazardous intersection of Reno Road, 38th Street, and Harrison Street.

12. The proposed contra-flow bike lane on 39th Street (a) will be dangerous for bicyclists who will be opposing the one-way vehicular traffic, and (b) will not assist bicyclists attempting to cross Reno Road on 39th Street.

13. DDOT's proposal will not improve safety for pedestrians seeking to cross Reno Road at this intersection.

14. DDOT's proposal will not improve safety for vehicles crossing Reno Road on 39th Street from the south, even though half of all recorded accidents have involved those vehicles.

15. According to DDOT, installation of a four-way stop at the intersection of 39th and Reno Road would be undesirable because there is more traffic on Reno Road than on 39th Street, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) advises that "Multi-way stop control is used where the volume of traffic on the intersecting roads is approximately equal" (FHWA, Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Section 2B.07.01).

16. DDOT did not collect data on the peak-hour traffic on 39th Street but calculated a rough estimate using the expected ratio of the highest designed hour of traffic to the average annual daily traffic.

17. There are numerous examples of multi-way stops in this neighborhood where the volume of traffic on the intersecting road is not approximately equal (e.g., Nebraska Avenue and Northampton Street, Military Road and 43rd Street, Nevada Avenue at Livingston Street, Utah Avenue and Tennyson Street, and Western Avenue and Broad Branch Road.)

18. DDOT considered the volume of traffic on 39th Street four blocks away at Military Road to be sufficient to warrant installing a traffic signal, even though the volume of traffic on Military Road exceeds that on 39th Street.

19. FHWA guidance also provides that engineering judgment should be exercised to consider specific conditions, including, "The need to control vehicle/pedestrian conflicts near locations that generate high pedestrian volumes; [and] Locations where a road user, after stopping, cannot see conflicting traffic and is not able to negotiate the intersection unless conflicting cross traffic is also required to stop" (FHWA Manual, Section 2B.07.05).

20. The intersection of 39th Street and Reno Road (a) is a high-volume intersection that should have controls to prevent vehicle/pedestrian conflicts and (b) is a location where a driver on 39th Street approaching Reno Road cannot see conflicting traffic and is not able to negotiate the intersection unless conflicting cross traffic is also required to stop.

21. About twenty residents of ANC 3G07 living on Reno Road, Jenifer, Ingomar, and 39th Streets closest to the intersection of 39th Street and Reno Road, met on January 18, 2017, and expressed their opposition to DDOT's proposed change.

22. More than 130 residents have signed a petition opposing DDOT's proposal and requested instead that DDOT install a four-way stop or traffic signal at Reno Road and 39th Street, and that it trim vegetation in public space, if needed to improve sight lines. They argue that the NOI (a) does not protect pedestrians, (b) will make bicyclists more vulnerable when riding against the vehicular traffic, and (c) will divert traffic to Jenifer Street where it will create other hazards.

23. About 100 residents have signed a petition supporting DDOT's proposal to make 39th Street one-way northbound and oppose the four-way stop or traffic signal on the grounds that (a) this would be the least disruptive solution, (b) drivers on Reno Road would disregard a stop sign, and (c) a stop sign would cause undue backups on Reno Road, thereby inducing drivers to take other routes through the neighborhood and contributing to air pollution.

24. Residents have also suggested traffic enforcement measures that, when coupled with a four-way stop, would further mitigate the dangers at this intersection and improve compliance, including speed cameras on this portion of Reno Road to slow traffic, flashing lights and signs to warn of an upcoming dangerous intersection, warning signs on Reno Road about the upcoming stop sign, and stop-sign cameras to identify violators.

25. A four-way stop at the Reno Road intersection with 39th Street will have an acceptable impact on Reno Road traffic because traffic control signals on Reno Road at Fessenden and at Military Road already regulate traffic flow through this area.

26. DDOT has not provided any evidence of a sight line test for this intersection using accepted Federal Highway Administration standards, and such a test would be useful in assessing the impact of various proposed solutions.

Based on this evidence and analysis and after considering the views of residents that have expressed support for or opposition to the NOI, ANC 3/4G concludes that:

A. DDOT's proposal to make 39th Street one-way northbound between Reno Road and Jenifer Street, would divert traffic to the intersections at Jenifer and Reno Road and Reno Road and 38th Street, exacerbating potentially hazardous conditions at both of those locations;

B. The MPD traffic data that DDOT used shows that half the accidents at the 39th Street and Reno intersection occur between 39th Street northbound traffic and Reno Road traffic, but DDOT's proposal does nothing to resolve this issue.

C. DDOT's proposal will not resolve concerns about pedestrians' safety when crossing Reno Road and may create a more hazardous situation for bicyclists on a contra-flow bike lane;

D. The applicable FHWA guidance permits DDOT to install a four-way stop at Reno Road and 39th Street based on engineering judgment that it will prevent vehicle/pedestrian conflicts and that drivers are not able to see conflicting traffic and are not able to negotiate the intersection unless conflicting cross traffic is also required to stop;

E. DDOT has exercised its engineering judgment to install multi-way stops at intersections that are analogous to 39th Street and Reno Road, and the traffic signal at 39th Street and Military Road suggests that the traffic volume on 39th Street is sufficient to warrant a four-way stop;

F. DDOT can address any concerns about the impact of a four-way stop by removing vegetation in public space and by installing enforcement mechanisms -- e.g., stop-sign cameras and stop-ahead signs -- that will improve compliance with the four-way stop;

G. A four-way stop should not require removal of large street trees that are an asset to the District and the community, and those trees should only be removed as a last resort after other reasonable alternatives have been tried and after DDOT has conducted appropriate sight line tests; and

H. Although there is no clear consensus among the affected residents, on balance, a four-way stop achieves the greatest safety improvement for vehicles and pedestrians with the fewest adverse consequences for the community.

For these reasons, ANC 3/4G resolves that DDOT should reject the proposal to make 39th Street NW between Reno Road and Jenifer Street one-way, and instead should adopt its alternate proposal to install a four-way stop at the intersection of 39th and Reno, to remove vegetation in public space, as necessary, to improve sight lines, and to install enforcement mechanisms to enhance compliance.

Approved by the ANC at its regularly scheduled and noticed February 27, 2017 meeting by a vote of 6 to 0 (a quorum being 4).

Randy Speck, Chair

Rebecca Maydak, Secretary