



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

April 10, 2023

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached a letter dated April 3rd 2023 from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) indicating they will limit Memorial Drive closures to the legislatively mandated dates and times moving forward. This letter was sent in response to a letter sent by the City Manager, also attached, in furtherance of the City Council order of February 27th 2023 requesting that Riverbend Park at Memorial Drive be closed for the spring, summer and fall of 2023.

Despite this decision by DCR, we plan to continue to pursue mitigation strategies to lessen the impacts of Memorial Drive closures in adjacent neighborhoods. The City's Department of Traffic, Parking and Transportation (TP&T) has begun to collect traffic data on the surrounding streets and neighborhoods and expects to look at measures to mitigate traffic impacts in the neighboring streets, most particularly Putnam Avenue and Western Avenue. The mitigation measures being looked at will also include changes in the timing of the lights on both Memorial Drive and on Soldiers Road Drive on Saturdays as well as at the intersection of Western Avenue and Putnam Avenue. Given the present decision by the DCR to eliminate Saturday closures, we will need to make certain assumptions about traffic patterns during Saturday closures rather than collecting actual traffic counts to use in modeling the impacts.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager

Attachment(s)





April 3, 2023

Yi-An Huang, City Manager
City of Cambridge
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Mr. Huang:

I am writing in response to your letter from March 3, 2023, requesting a permanent expansion of Riverbend Park on Memorial Drive in Cambridge to include both Saturday and Sunday roadway closures during the spring, summer, and fall.

As you are aware, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has worked closely with the City of Cambridge over the past three years to provide expanded outdoor recreational opportunities for our residents. During lockdown, DCR closed many road segments throughout greater Boston, including extended hours at Riverbend Park. Our open spaces provided critical opportunities to support the physical and mental well-being of residents during that difficult time. The coordination and expansion of this park from one to two days was the direct result of the COVID pandemic. Riverbend Park is the final remaining park to return to its pre-COVID-19 schedule in the DCR system.

As you know, while this effort was a success in expanding access to outdoor recreation, it was not without its negative impacts, particularly to the surrounding neighborhood, who expressed concerns about rerouted Memorial Drive traffic in residential areas and associated pollution. It is also worth noting that parts of the adjacent neighborhoods are classified as an [environmental justice block group](#). DCR and the executive office are eager to ensure all communities have access to open space, but we must also ensure that no community disproportionately bears the impacts.

In weighing this request, DCR has reviewed its authority to permanently expand such an opportunity. With the lifting of the COVID-19 emergency order on both the state and federal levels, DCR has determined a return to pre-pandemic operations at Riverbend Park is appropriate at this time. This change is to ensure compliance with Chapter 457 of the Acts of 1985 and to address the impacts on those on the surrounding neighborhood.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Department of Conservation and Recreation
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Boston, MA 02114-2199
617-626-1250 617-626-1351 Fax
www.mass.gov/orgs/departments-of-conservation-recreation



Maura T. Healey
Governor

Kimberley L. Driscoll
Lt. Governor

Rebecca L. Tepper, Secretary
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Douglas Rice, Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

With that in mind, I am writing to inform you that DCR will be returning to the statutory mandated days and hours of operation, closing Memorial Drive to create Riverbend Park on Sundays during the hours of 11 am to 7 pm from the last Sunday of April through the second Sunday of November.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter and please contact my office if you have any questions. I look forward to continuing to collaborate closely with the City of Cambridge across our shared assets.

Regards,
Douglas Rice
Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation



YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

City of Cambridge

Executive Department

Douglas Rice,
Commissioner
Department of Conservation and Recreation
DCR Main Office
251 Causeway St.
Boston, Massachusetts 02114

March 3rd 2023

Re: Riverbend Park on Memorial Drive.

Dear Commissioner Rice,

The City of Cambridge hereby requests that the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) close Memorial Drive between Gerry's Landing Road and Western Avenue to vehicular traffic on both Saturday and Sunday through the spring, summer, and fall of 2023. This request is being made as a result of a Cambridge City Council order that passed on Monday February 27th, 2023 asking that the City Manager work with state agencies to ensure the success of the proposed closures this year.

This section of Memorial Drive, known as Riverbend Park, provides essential access to open space, recreational opportunities, and the Charles River for thousands of Cambridge residents each weekend. As you may be aware, community outreach completed over the past year has identified very strong support for Saturday closures in addition to the traditional Sunday closures. This outreach also identified concerns over the impacts the Saturday closures have on traffic in the adjacent Riverside neighborhood.

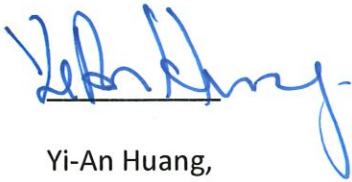
It is the City's hope that we can work collaboratively with you to mitigate the traffic impacts associated with the Saturday closures on neighboring streets. While the City plans to look closely at traffic impacts and changes on City streets, we look to partner with you to improve the functioning of the intersections of Memorial Drive and Western Ave in Cambridge, and Soldier's Field Road and Western Ave in Boston. The weekend closures of Memorial Drive significantly alter the traffic pattern of vehicles passing through this area, and weekend-specific

traffic signal timing can address those changes. Through changes to signal timing and lane use markings at these intersections and on the Bridge, we hope to optimize the flow of traffic during the weekend closures. Improving the operation of these intersections will mitigate the impact of traffic backups on the Riverside neighborhood.

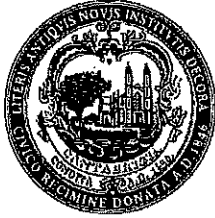
In addition to mitigating the traffic impacts on the Riverside neighborhood, we plan to conduct a season long study to quantify the overall traffic impacts of the weekend closures on the neighborhoods adjacent to Riverbend Park. By collecting data this Spring and Summer, we can all share a better understanding of the traffic changes stemming from the closures, and by extension additional mitigations that could be implemented. Further, we look forward to working out the details of the closures with you to further mitigate the impacts on local streets.

As always, we greatly appreciate your continuing partnership with the City in our efforts to ensure the closure of Riverbend Park to vehicular traffic and the creation of the additional open space opportunities along the Parkway will work well this year, while at the same time working with us to ensure we do everything possible to accommodate the adjacent Riverside neighborhood directly impacted by the road closure.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Yi-An Huang", is written over a horizontal line.

Yi-An Huang,
City Manager



City of Cambridge

0-5
Calendar Item # 1
FIRST IN COUNCIL
~~February 13, 2023~~
February 27, 2023

COUNCILLOR AZEEM
COUNCILLOR ZONDERVAN
COUNCILLOR NOLAN
VICE MAYOR MALLON

WHEREAS: Sufficient access to open space is crucial for the health and well-being of Cambridge residents, and a matter of social equity and justice particularly for underserved communities that may have limited access to these amenities in denser neighborhoods consistent with the Envision Cambridge Final Report; and

WHEREAS: The closure of Riverbend Park along Memorial Drive from Gerry's Landing to Western Avenue on Saturdays and Sundays during the spring, summer, and fall months provides expanded open space, and has become highly utilized by thousands of residents of all ages and abilities throughout the year; and

WHEREAS: The Riverside Community Conversation report published by the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department in July 2022 found that 94% of Riverside residents make use of Riverbend Park's open space, but also identified that 10% of Riverside residents indicated that there is unacceptable traffic; and

WHEREAS: Some members of the Riverside neighborhood have urged that the City collect data on the impacts of the closures; and some of the data points that people have suggested would be most beneficial to obtain includes the following:

- The impacts of the full weekend closures of Memorial Drive upon Putnam Avenue and Western Avenue
- Changes to traffic patterns that may arise during the year, and during large events such as Boston Calling; now therefore be it

WHEREAS: During six community meetings from May through October 2022, many community members shared specific ideas to reduce the associated impacts of such closures, including adjustments to traffic signal timings for the weekends, as they are currently optimized for vehicle circulation during the weekday evening commute hour, changes to lane markings, detouring traffic away from neighborhood streets, and improving communication with residents about closures; now therefore be it

ORDERED: That the City Manager expeditiously confer with the appropriate departments and agencies to continue Riverbend Park closures on Saturdays and Sundays this year with a schedule based on last year's successful pilot, starting the first weekend of Spring and ending on the last weekend of Fall; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager expand outreach and communication efforts to residents in the Riverside and West Cambridge neighborhoods to inform residents of traffic changes, and to investigate opportunities to support open space programming in consultation with community organizations and local businesses at Riverbend Park; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager work with the appropriate departments to study traffic impacts to residents along Putnam Avenue and Western Avenue, including side streets, and to identify potential opportunities to mitigate those impacts by providing drivers with signage to prevent excess traffic into the Riverside neighborhood, and information on wayfinding applications to discourage drivers from being routed through the area during the closures, and to reduce incidents of blocking the box at intersections such as Western Avenue and Putnam Avenue; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager work with the appropriate city and state agencies to mitigate any related traffic impacts that are observed during the closures, with a particular emphasis on improving traffic signals and lane markings along Western Avenue at Putnam Ave, Memorial Drive, and Soldier's Field Road, including the coordination of the signals at Putnam and Western in Cambridge and Soldiers Field Road and Western in Boston, and that on weekends a sufficient proportion of the light cycle is dedicated to Western Avenue traffic with the addition of an exclusive pedestrian signal for people using Riverbend Park and the Paul Dudley White path, with lane assignments varied and optimized to reduce backups in Cambridge; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to work with the appropriate city and state agencies to mitigate any related traffic impacts that are observed during the closures, with a particular emphasis on improving traffic signals and lane markings along Western Avenue at Putnam Ave, Memorial Drive, and Soldier's Field Road, and to identify opportunities to provide drivers with information about the closures and wayfinding applications to prevent excess traffic into the Riverside neighborhood and reduce incidents of blocking the box at intersections such as Western Avenue and Putnam Avenue with traffic details and intersection markings; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager provide a preliminary report on the analysis of the closure back to the City Council by July 31, 2023.

In City Council February 27, 2023.
Adopted by a ye and nay vote:-
Yeas 7; Nays 2; Absent 0
Attest:- Diane P. LeBlanc, City Clerk

A true copy;

ATTEST:-



Diane P. LeBlanc,
City Clerk