

JFK Drive Closure and People with Disabilities Summary of December 10, 2020 Focus Group

December 11, 2020

After the October 20, 2020 meeting of the Mayor's Disability Council, people who had provided public comments about the closure of JFK Drive were invited to participate in follow-up activities. On December 10, 2020, the Mayor's Office on Disability convened a focus group comprised of eight individuals from this larger group. After reviewing a summary of the comments that had been received earlier, the group was asked these questions:

- What are the most serious barriers to your ability to enjoy the Park and its amenities because of the temporary closure?
- What accessibility features are the most essential for effective access to the Park for you?
- One of the reasons for temporarily closing JFK Drive is to make it easier for all people to maintain social distance while enjoying the Park. What are some approaches that you would use to make it equally enjoyable for people with disabilities?
- From the disability community perspective, what innovations might make this area of Park more accessible and enjoyable for all?

This is a summary of their responses:

There was consistent agreement with the concerns raised in the October public comments. (See "Summary of Public Comments on JFK Closure".)

A major focus of discussion was on the lack of adequate parking resulting from the closure. Participants all agreed that having adequate free parking adjacent to the DeYoung Museum is essential to their ability to enjoy that area of the Park.

Several described their inability to use public transit and maintained that traveling in their own car is how they go places.

Most spoke about the high cost of the parking garage, pointing out that for them it is unaffordable to park there, even for a short time.

Several spoke about the disproportionate negative impact on people of color and working class people, explaining that getting to the park without a car is difficult and exhausting for people who already have jobs that take a lot out of them.

Several participants felt that the closure favors those who are privileged to have a good income and are not disabled. They are angry that bicyclists and joggers are able to enjoy the park while people with disabilities are not. Some said that they suspect the Bicycle Coalition has exploited the pandemic to push through their agenda of closing JFK Drive permanently.

Some spoke about the many steps to make the museum more accessible and available to people with disabilities and low-income people taken by the de Young Museum. They felt that this action defeats those initiatives and is elitist.

A few brought up that many others will be negatively affected such as volunteer gardeners who need to park nearby to transport gardening supplies and families with small children (especially children with disabilities) with lots of items to carry.

Several people have long family histories of strong connections to the Park and the museum; they said that a permanent closure of JFK Drive would sever these connections.

Some offered that other streets like Middle Drive or areas west of the Concourse could be closed instead of JFK Drive, which should be open because it provides accessible and useable parking adjacent to the museum.

Several participants would like Rec and Parks and MTA to think out of the box to find design oriented solutions through re-configuring the way traffic and people currently operate in the Park. The Park is very big, and within it there should be possible solutions that would offer safe and distanced opportunities to enjoy the Park without taking away the parking on JFK Drive adjacent to the museum and other widely used amenities.

People with disabilities need to be involved in coming up with viable alternative solutions and in reviewing plans before they are implemented.