

Reopening Klingle Road: The Debate Continues

By Ron Shaffer Copyright © Washington Post District Weekly
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Dear Dr. Gridlock:

We know you did not leap to conclusions when you stated your support for reopening Klingle Road. Local leaders surrounding this road have had many public hearings and have voted to support the reopening of this valuable collector road, which served 3,200 cars a day. You can guess where these cars now travel.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3C is the only ANC split down the middle on this issue. Every ANC in Wards 1 and 4 that has considered this issue has voted to repair and reopen Klingle Road.

These ANCs, whose opinions are considered of great weight, include the neighborhoods of Adams-Morgan, Mount Pleasant, Crestwood, 16th Street Heights, Shepherd Park and Rock Creek East.

The "environmental" arguments for tearing the road out don't hold water. In fact, when it was a working road, the tiny Klingle stream next to Klingle Road supported one of the more ecologically balanced and natural aquatic faunal communities in the District, according to a 1988 study conducted under agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency.

Fixing Klingle Road will not be a death knell for this little stream, Rock Creek or the Potomac River.

Klingle Road used to be a beautiful and useful way to get across town. The current condition of the valley should be an embarrassment to the Sierra Club and the knee-jerk environmentalists who would rob the public of this important thoroughfare.

Most of them probably never used the road. Based on their self-dramatized ravings and inconsistent rhetoric, they don't really know the issues themselves.

Some of these self-proclaimed "environmentalists" went so far as to move the barricades and drive their cars down the closed portion of Klingle to join in a tiny Earth Day gathering on our public road.

Shame on these hypocrites!

Laurie Collins
ANC Commissioner 1E

Dear Dr. Gridlock:

Thank you for your continuing coverage of the need to repair Klingle Road. The many people who live east of Rock Creek Park have suffered for 10 years without Klingle Road and, until recently, have tried to understand the city's lack of funds to pay even the 20 percent match needed to repair the road.

But now, as The Washington Post's recent editorial aptly recognized, we are being unfairly repaid for our patience by having the city drag its heels on even finishing the totally unnecessary study

on the road. If only that money could have been spent years ago or could now be spent simply to repair the road!

In fact, it is the lack of these repairs for the past 10 years that has caused the environmental damage, not the existence of the road.

As an environmental lawyer who has represented citizens' groups for more than 35 years and has lived east of the park all that time, too, I am truly dismayed that the Sierra Club's D.C. chapter and other so-called environmentalists are opposing the road's repair.

These folks, most of whom don't even live in the District and have never used the road, clearly have not done their homework about the causes of the environmental problems. The failure to repair the road 10 years ago, plus the current delay in road repairs, has produced the drainage problems and erosion, not the road itself.

If they really care about the environment, they would want the road repaired, too. Then they would have lots of supporters from east of the park for the other, much more important environmental issues in the city, such as cleaning up the Anacostia River and stopping sprawl.

Members of the D.C. Council who have previously expressed support for keeping Klingle Road closed are starting to realize how expensive that would be. If the road is officially closed, not only would the city have to pay for taking up the road surface, but the District also would have to buy the land back from the Klingle family.

That is because of the language in the deed from the family to the District, which conveys the land "in perpetuity for use as a public road."

Thus, if the land is no longer used for a road, it reverts to the Klingle family, whose matriarch still lives in Cleveland Park. The District would have to exercise eminent domain to condemn the closed road for a park.

Needless to say, that amount of land in Cleveland Park adjacent to Rock Creek Park will be appraised at a very high value. It seems very unlikely that the city could afford to buy the land.

Thank you for your ongoing support on repairing Klingle Road.

Suellen Keiner
Washington

Dear Dr. Gridlock:

The argument to turn Klingle Road into a park is misleading and flawed. By doing nothing now and for the last 11 years to the area, the mayor allows unchecked pollutants spewing from the unrepaired drainage system to continue contaminating the stream.

Doing nothing contributes to the destruction of the valley and road and only further increases the cost of repairing it. Creating further "studies" of this political football wastes more of our tax dollars.

Eighty percent of the cost to repair the road will be provided by federal funding. This funding was approved but, because of the dysfunction of the last administration, was never spent on this public works project. The completed engineering plans had been paid for.

Electing not to repair the road could hold the District taxpayers liable for the entire cost of repairs.

In 1995, the National Park Service indicated that Klingle Road is critical to protection of life and property. In June 2000, it stated that this was a local city issue and that it would not testify. This new director (of three months) disregarded her predecessors and stated that after the city pays to "correct" the valley (rip out the road), the service will be glad to own it.

According to the 1995 study, an average of 3,200 cars used Klingle Road each day. Now these cars are spending on average 15 extra minutes driving time each day; 11 years times 50 weeks times 5 days a week times 3,200 cars times 15 minutes equals 132 million extra minutes of carbon monoxide exhaust and wasted gasoline since closing Klingle Road. This is without taking into consideration any increase in population.

It is environmentally irresponsible to keep this road closed. It is also completely opposite of the Sierra Club's "restoring the core" program, which advocates decreasing auto emissions, one of the leading causes of asthma.

I was an ANC commissioner in 3C from 1995 to 1998. I witnessed the manipulation of government officials who illegally and without due process declared the road closed. See our Web site for full documentation: www.repairklingleroad.org.

Most of the D.C. Council members want the road repaired. They do not agree with Kathy Patterson's premature back yard views. There is much support throughout the entire city to repair the road. More petition signatures arrive daily; however, to turn the future of this road into a popularity contest is a gross injustice.

The city promised it would repair our road once we had the money. It is the city's obligation to repair public roads in a timely manner. The citizens should not be subjected to any more political stalling.

Jeanne M. Ingram
Washington