

MEMBER SUBMISSION: OPEN STREETS NOT FOR ALL

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The Open Streets Program is not for all. The program that was once welcomed during the pandemic is now harming businesses and residents and with little to no oversight, accountability or transparency for the nonprofits that run them.

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OF THEM.

There is no requirement for community consultation or consent to close down a street, even a critical traffic artery. That has been our experience in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn—with the closure of Vanderbilt Avenue, a major thoroughfare, for six months a year, three days a week. Only certain business models benefit from the street closures. Mitchell's Soul Food, a 40-year-old Black-owned business, is not one of them. The Sunday street closures shuts out their customers who drive or take the bus after church, as they have for decades.



The crowd gathered outside of American Vegan on Saturday, June 26. Despite government officials intervening on that restaurant's behalf, the nonprofit that runs the Vanderbilt Open Streets program won't budge. *BKReader* ran an article

in May of this year about Mitchell's. Another restaurant, American Vegan, already closed down, in large part after a series of run-ins with the nonprofit.

Neighboring streets are clogged with traffic when the three-day street closures are in effect, harming businesses and residents in the surrounding area. Prospect Heights is a privileged neighborhood with ample access to beautiful green spaces (including a brand new one, Pacific Park). It is difficult to justify the need for the concrete open space when the harm to many clearly outweighs the few who benefit. A group of neighbors came together to fight back and the United Neighbors of Prospect and Crown Heights was born.