

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

VILLAGE COUNCIL

MELANIE ROSE WHITE, *Mayor*
MICHAEL MEZEY, *Chairman*
BRUCE R. PIRNIE, *Vice Chairman*
ALFRED MULLER, M.D., *Secretary*
PAULA DURBIN, *Treasurer*
MICHAEL J. DORSEY, *Parliamentarian*
CAROLINA ZUMARAN-JONES, *Historian*
JULIAN P. MANSFIELD, *Village Manager*

4433 SOUTH PARK AVENUE
CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815

Phone: 301-656-2797

Fax: 301-907-3922

Email: info@friendshipheightsmd.gov

Website: www.friendshipheightsmd.gov



Testimony of Michael Mezey, Chairman, Friendship Heights Village Council FY 23 Capital Budget and FY 23-28 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Public Hearing February 8, 2022

My name is Michael Mezey and I am Chair of the Friendship Heights Village Council, testifying on behalf of the Village Council and the Village's residents.

The subject of my testimony is Willard Avenue Park, located just west of the Village of Friendship Heights.

A bit of history: In recognition of the need for park land to service the thousands of residents living in and around Friendship Heights, in 1995, the County spent taxpayer park funds to acquire an acre of land adjoining the existing Willard Avenue Park. The acquired acre of land contains an old house which was to be torn down and the land used to expand the park.

Incredibly, it is now 27 years later and the county has still failed to convert the land to park use. The acre of land remains surrounded by a metal fence and the house is rented to a private party, supposedly at a market rate.

Our pleas to Park and Planning to place the acre into park service have been ignored on the grounds that there is no money. However, past CIP budgets have included funds that could have been used, and the current CIP budget, **specifically the Urban Parks Elements program**, has funds that can be used for such projects at the discretion of Park and Planning. Nonetheless, we have been advised that once again there are no current plans for using such funds for the Willard Avenue Park.

It should be a source of embarrassment to the County that 27 years have passed since the Friendship Heights Village community was promised additional parkland in recognition of the need to serve the very dense development authorized by the County's Sector Plan. Taxpayer funds were expended to acquire the land but the

funds spent have never been put to park use but rather have served as a source of rental income for Park and Planning.

We have been more than patient. It is time for the County to live up to its commitment to provide Friendship Heights Village with the promised parkland and to utilize the taxpayer money previously spent from park funds for park purposes.

We request that the Council fulfill this nearly three decade commitment and insert a provision in the Urban Parks Elements program mandating that some of the program funds be used to convert the previously purchased acre to park use to be enjoyed by residents and taxpayers rather than maintain its current status which is devoted to the private use and enjoyment of the few individuals who reside on the property.