

To the Honorable County Executive and Council Members,

I urge you to **approve the full operating budget request for Montgomery Parks** of \$124.9 million. Our parks are essential to the physical and mental health of county residents. The pandemic demonstrated just how important nature is to all county residents, as record numbers of people have taken advantage of county parks. The extra use and love comes at a cost, and there is an urgent need for a full complement of employees who operate the facilities, design and build new parks to provide greater access, patrol over 37,000 acres of parkland, arrange programs and events now that people can more safely gather again, and funding is needed for the supplies and equipment to operate and maintain our parks.

The full operating budget request would also provide resources to increase programs that enhance access to trails and community gardens, improve the quality of our athletic fields, all of which are in higher demand post-pandemic, and fund the increased public safety efforts required with extra use. The full operating budget would also expand historic and cultural programs focusing on the untold stories of our African American, Asian, Native American, and Latino communities were not funded—the importance of which we also learned during the pandemic.

Please approve the full Montgomery Parks operating budget request so the Parks Department can sustain the many programs and initiatives that have made this a 6-time Gold Medal-winning park system and expand key programs that respond to the increased demands of county residents.

Thank you,
Caryl McNeilly