

My name is Tino Calabria. Like several neighbors testifying today, I reside in West Friendship which is largely located alongside Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park in Friendship Heights. We thank you Councilmembers for this opportunity to comment on the proposed 2024 Budget and CIP Amendments.

A few homeowner and apartment-dwelling neighbors are touching on shortcomings in how and what we first learned about a dog park project — would you believe? — through a flyer dropped in our mailboxes by staffers of the County Department of Parks. My e-mailed testimony explains and describes an alternative to the staffers' dog park. (See text and rendering below.)

MiniPark-Within-the-Park

Visitors delight in the forested, hilly terrain of Willard Avenue Park, its children's playground, basketball half-court, exercise equipment, the jogging paths and trails for dog owners with their dogs -- everyone enjoys the Park.



Well, not everyone. Not the many who must rely on walkers, elbow-crutches, wheelchairs, or other assistive devices to get around. Whether young or elderly, they lack access.

What makes the Park so appealing to others -- its forested terrain criss-crossed with up-and-down trails: Ironically, it's exactly this woody, hilly feature along a brook that poses a barrier to folks with ambulatory disabilities.

If built, the MiniPark pictured above would finally provide access to so many more residents of Willard Avenue's nine high-rise condos, apartments, and its single-family homes. They'll be able to enter at least this small parcel of the Park with its chess and checkers boards, benches, picnic tables, a community garden, and other amenities as they gain access upon entering the MiniPark.

Dogs would remain welcome in the MiniPark, as dogs have always been welcome throughout the Park. Therefore, creating the MiniPark instead of installing a dog park will not disfavor dogs.

In fact, the Willard Avenue Park will become more inclusive. At long last, it will finally approach the measure of equity that neighbors with ambulatory disabilities deserve and have needed since the Park opened 45 years ago.

By providing the MiniPark-Within-the-Park alternative, the County will progress further in terms of the County's ADA Title II Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice. Each year the Department of Parks budget includes funds to implement the Agreement in both local parks (P28701) and Non-Local Parks (P128702) for a total of \$1.8 million in 2024.*

Creating the MiniPark with any such funds will help achieve two important things: 1) Make an existing, poorly accessible park already in our park system finally accessible for those with disabilities and our seniors; and 2) show the Department of Justice new progress in our Title II Agreement compliance.

Now, during whatever remains of my three-minute testimony, I'm happy to discuss any questions.