

TO: The members of the Montgomery County Council
RE: Park Funding in the FY25-39 CIP
FROM: Roger Paden, 2209 Richland PL, Silver Spring

I write to urge the County Council to fully fund the Park Department's FY25-30 budget request. Doing so will help Parks deliver a variety of projects that encourage physical activity and social connections, as well as projects that fulfill its central mission of environmental stewardship.

The budget includes many items that help maintain existing parks and create new ones. However, the County Executive has recommended a reduction of more than \$24M to the Parks CIP request. If the Council allows these cuts to stand, many critical projects will be delayed or cut entirely.

Park Renovation and Restoration: Exactly which projects will suffer these fates can only be determined later, but they might include such things as renovations to the Cabin John Regional Park Amphitheater, Valley Mill Park Group Picnic Area, Rock Creek Trail, Sligo Creek Trail, Brookside Nature Center Exhibit.... The list literally goes on and on.

However, the most important renovation project for me is the renovation of the **Rosemary Hills-Lyttonsville Local Park**. This park is in desperate need of renovation. Its basketball and tennis courts are cracked and rough and in need of resurfacing. Its soccer field is worn out and the areas in front of its goals flood with the slightest rain. Storm water management within the park is in need of upgrading. A short trail on the south edge of the park needs resurfacing as the roots of leaning trees beside it have made its surface rough and impassable for those who are mobility challenged. Fortunately, the D-18 legislative team has managed to get \$800,000 of State money earmarked for this purpose, most of which will be spent on the soccer field. The Park's budget request includes additional County money spread across several categories to help with this renovation and to add amenities, including a pavilion and a soccer court. This money is necessary if the renovation is to move forward.

The community has been meeting and will continue to meet with Park staff to develop plans for the park. At the last meeting late last year, the staff's presentation of the final design concept was repeatedly interrupted by applause and questions were routinely prefaced with heartfelt thanks for the innovative way problems in the park were addressed. The design, which will be further refined through additional meetings, was the result of an amazing collaborative process, that should serve as a model for how county agencies interact with citizens. One thing which deserves to be highlighted is the design's emphasis on soccer facilities. Not only will the existing full-sized soccer field be re-graded and otherwise renovated, but the plan also includes a new soccer court. The existing soccer field is the most used facility in the park, and I am sure that the new court will also be greatly used too. The surrounding community includes many new Hispanic and African residents, and the renovation will be particularly welcomed by them. These facilities will greatly benefit local residents and invite residents from a greater distance to visit our park.

New Parks and Master Plans: The County Executive's proposed cuts will also prevent the Park

Department from implementing new master plans. I am especially concerned that the plan for the Wheaton Regional Park move forward. It is a wonderful park, although it, too, is in need of much new work. Moreover, there exist problems in its current design and its new plan is most welcome.

In addition, the proposed cuts will delay the construction of new parks, including the one in which I am most interested, the **Lyttonsville Civic Green**.

This small park is located along the Purple Line, just a block away from the new Talbot Avenue Bridge. It will serve as a convenient shaded rest stop for people traveling the Capital Crescent Trail. It is also located at the edge of an historically Afro-American community, a community that was created by free Blacks before the Civil War. Established in the 1850s, it is among the oldest neighborhoods in Montgomery County. The park will contain a historically monument to the community.

The monument will focus on the bridge and its role in the community. It has been designed around the two main girders of the old Talbot Avenue Bridge, which are its main architectural features. It will make clear that this often-overlooked community existed and has persisted in southern Montgomery County against all odds. It will tell the story of that community and its struggles. Surrounded by communities with racially restrictive real estate covenants and near the sundown town of Silver Spring, the community faced many obstacles. The Talbot Avenue Bridge demarcated the community, while providing access to jobs and shopping in the surrounding, and, to our residents, more dangerous communities. A historical terrace located in the park will help tell this story. A brief history of the bridge and its connection to the community can be found at

<https://blog.historian4hire.net/2017/09/02/bridge-documentary-video/>

In addition, the park is a design gem. I urge you to go to the park website and look at the plans.

<https://montgomeryparks.org/projects/directory/lyttonsville-area-future-neighborhood-park-project/>

Park designers solved many design problems associated with its rather tricky location and its complex program. Their solution is environmentally sensitive, and I believe that the park will serve as an environmental and historical teaching tool for the nearby Rosemary Hills Elementary School.

The community has worked with many agencies within the State and County government for over a 7 year period to help bring this park into existence. It is truly OUR park. It was because of our work on the Purple Line at the PLAIG committee that the land for the proposed park is now county land. Originally, the Purple Line had proposed using this CSX-owned site as a location for a Transit Power Substation (TPSS). Community members on the PLAIG committee proposed that this substation could be located between the Purple Line tracks and the CSX tracks at the end of a dead-end section of Talbot Avenue. The Planning Department Staff, then working on

the Greater Lyttonsville Sector Plan, adopted this idea and helped MTA to see its advantages. This freed up the land, which was then given to the County for use as a park. Separately, the community worked with Tim Cupples of the MC-DOT to save and store the two main girders of the old Talbot Avenue Bridge so that they could be used as a central part of a memorial to the community. Tim proposed that they might be placed in the new park. The Planning Staff highlighted the need for this park in the Greater Lyttonsville Sector plan of 2019 and the Planning Board recently endorsed the plan and provided money for this purpose in its budget request. Meanwhile, members of the community started work with the Park Department's planning staff on the design of the park. That collaboration was amazing. Ching-Fang Chen and Patricia McManus have, for the entire length of the design process, worked tirelessly with the community to create this excellent plan. I am sure that it will win design awards as soon as the park is completed, but what is really deserved is an award for good government. They have remained attentive, provocative, realistic, and professional throughout this entire process. The County is lucky to have them. They are for us treasured members of the County government.

I hope that the Council will restore the money that the County Executive has cut from the Park Department's budget request. That request includes money for any number of vital projects, but none, I think, are more important than the ones I have highlighted above.

Roger Paden