

North Woodside Citizens' Association Testimony re: 2025-30 CIP

As a complement to our oral testimony at the County Council Public Hearing February 6, 2024, the North Woodside Citizens' Association submits as written testimony a transcript of our oral testimony in favor of the future Lyttonsville Neighborhood Park (aka "Lyttonsville Civic Green" in the 2025-30 CIP) presented by NWCA board member Anna White to the Montgomery County Planning Board on September 7, 2023.

For a little geographical context: North Woodside, a neighborhood of about 350 homes, is located adjacent to Lyttonsville, on the other side of the train tracks. The historic Talbot Avenue Bridge spanned these train tracks and was the only direct physical connection between our two communities for over a century until its demolition in 2019. And while not located in our neighborhood, the future Lyttonsville park will be the closest park to many of our residents.

The North Woodside Citizens Association would like to register its strong support for the facility plan—and full funding—of the future new neighborhood park in Lyttonsville.

Our neighborhood has not always been a welcoming place for residents of the historically African American community of Lyttonsville. Founded in 1890—almost 40 years after Lyttonsville was—and developed further in the 1920s, our neighborhood had racist deed covenants that prohibited Black people from owning property or living in it, except as domestic servants. The 1940s census found just 11 Black people residing in our census district, all domestic servants. Even after racist deed covenants were ruled unenforceable, their legacy continued in patterns of urban development and neighborhood demographics. And, as we all too sadly know, the racist beliefs at their root did not all-of-a-sudden disappear. As late as the early 1960s Black people were still being denied service at popular businesses in downtown Silver Spring, just a mile from our neighborhood. This is not long ago history. This is recent history—in the lifetime of some sitting in the room and watching online today.

Current and former residents of Lyttonsville have shared with us stories of racial bigotry they experienced within North Woodside over the course of their lives, as children and as adults, and as late as the 1990s. When the historic Talbot Avenue Bridge fell into disrepair in the 1990s and North Woodside residents—and our association—advocated for its permanent closure to vehicles, some Lyttonsville residents perceived our efforts to be racially-motivated, something we learned 5 years ago when the short documentary film "The Bridge" was released. This is completely understandable in the context of local history and Lyttonsville residents' lived experience of racial bigotry. And, it was hard for some of us in North Woodside to hear.

In recent years, our association has taken steps to explore, acknowledge and denounce our neighborhood's role in past racial segregation, and to build with our Lyttonsville neighbors a foundation for a new chapter in the relationship of our communities, a new chapter rooted in mutual respect, friendship, unity, and love.

In September 2018 we unanimously passed a resolution to mark the occasion of the Talbot Avenue Bridge's Centennial Celebration, which our then President publicly presented on the Bridge to the over 300 attendees. In it we recognized the importance of the Talbot Avenue

Bridge to Lyttonsville, formally acknowledged and denounced racial bigotry, in all its forms, past and present, and, in particular, racist deed covenants. We especially recognized that current and former residents of Lyttonsville had experienced racial bigotry in our neighborhood. And we resolved that by recognizing this past and embracing our neighbors on both sides of the bridge, it enables us to work towards building a stronger community for the future.

A few years later, in May 2021, we voted to add language to our association bylaws that we “acknowledge our neighborhood's history of legal and de facto segregation and seek to make North Woodside a place for all people.”

It is in this same spirit that our neighborhood association strongly supports the creation of a neighborhood park in Lyttonsville, and the Bridge Memorial in particular, that will further help raise awareness of Lyttonsville history, which in many ways is intertwined with our own neighborhood's history; facilitate cross-track socializing; and deepen the shared sense of community among neighbors—and neighborhoods—connected by the bridge.

North Woodside Citizens' Association

Written version of oral testimony in support of restoring full funding for Montgomery Parks in the 2025-30 CIP, to be presented by NWCA board member Anna White during the County Council Public Hearing at a 1:30pm February 6 2024. Note: For the sake of brevity, there may be small inconsistencies between the oral and written versions of our testimony.

Good afternoon, Councilmembers. My name is Anna White, and my testimony today is on behalf of the North Woodside Citizens' Association, of which I am a board member.

We join the adjacent civic associations of Lyttonsville and Rosemary Hills in supporting full funding in the CIP of the "Lyttonsville Civic Green," also known as the "future Lyttonsville Neighborhood Park". This beautifully designed park—and the Bridge Memorial made from the steel girders of the historic Talbot Avenue Bridge, a main feature of it—will contribute to a more racially inclusive public narrative of our county's history, and serve as a unique cross-bridge community gathering space. The park will also provide vital green space in an area where vast numbers of trees have been clearcut for Purple Line construction, and adjacent to a large industrial area largely devoid of any greenery. (For more details regarding our support for this park please see additional written testimony submitted.)

We also support full funding for the renovation of nearby Rosemary Hills-Lyttonsville Local Park, which will soon become much more accessible to our residents with the opening of the new Talbot Avenue Bridge. We commend Montgomery Parks for expanding its community input process to include residents of adjacent apartments, and updating the park's design accordingly. Equitable outreach takes extra time, effort, and funds, and in a demographically diverse county such as ours, it is especially important.

Funding for these parks will come from various portions of the Parks' budget, which has been reduced over 5% in the proposed CIP from that requested. This puts in jeopardy sufficient funds for these parks and many other worthy park funding needs throughout the county.

Our county's parks are free of charge to enter, open to all, and offer so much to so many. Take a moment to reflect on what life would be like without our parks...They are our community "third spaces", our places to

play and exercise, our spaces to gather, our outdoor classrooms, and more. They are the outdoor living rooms of our communities, a vital part of the fabric of our lives and our well-being. They support our physical and mental health, our children's education, our understanding of our cultural and historical heritage, our community connection, and our natural environment.

When it comes to parks, our association advocates not from a NIMBY perspective (Not In My Backyard) or YIMBY perspective (Yes In My Backyard), rather a YIEBY perspective (Yes In *Everyone's* Backyard). We believe all county residents are deserving of access to well-designed and maintained parks.

We acknowledge there are many other important items in the CIP, such as boosting affordable housing, teachers' salaries, and climate-friendly initiatives. As you weigh the many and varied needs of our county, we urge you to restore full funding for Montgomery Parks, if at all possible. While it amounts to just 5% of the CIP, the value of our public parks to the well-being of our county's residents, now and in the future, is truly beyond measure.