

My name is Alison Gillespie, and I'm a former PTA president, former neighborhood association president, current board member of Bike Maryland, former volunteer for Montgomery Parks, trail liaison for a mountain biking group called the Mid Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts, and the mom of two graduates Einstein High School in Wheaton. For more than 11 years, I was a volunteer at the Nature Center in Wheaton. I'm here tonight speaking on my own behalf, but all of my experiences in the community have shaped and educated my perspective. I'm heavily invested in making this place better.

So: I'm here to ask that you support the Parks budget request and fully fund our parks system. There are many things I'd like that money to do, but I especially want Wheaton Regional Park funded.

Our local parks are my cathedral and my gym. They are the place I go for respite, for fun, for fellowship and for exercise. They are one of the best things about living here. Parks are a great investment that pays huge dividends. Trails, especially. We have a world class trail system that is the envy of other park systems across the nation. We need to keep it that way.

Each time my friends and I ride our bikes, we stop for lunch or dinner afterwards. One recent adventure in Bethesda took us from our bikes to a wonderful locally owned restaurant. We sat for hours, eating, drinking and having a good time, and spending money! On a local business! We have often done the same in Clarksburg, and Cloverly, Briggs Chaney and Gaithersburg after riding Seneca Bluffs, Cabin John, Fairland, Black Hills or Muddy Branch. And we also shop for bike equipment locally, supporting great little shops that fix our big wheels up very nicely.

So although I believe that parks are worth the money no matter what, I do want you to think about how much return you get in the form of local economic boosts each time you make a park trail into a great destination. Some of my fellow riders travel from Virginia and DC to ride here each week. Not only do you serve the locals, you bring in money from visitors.

So, Wheaton Regional Park. I was part of the team that worked in conjunction with Parks staff to plan for the future of this incredible, vibrant place. It is one of the most heavily used parks in the system. After sixty years, it is sorely in need of upgrades and repairs.

We have a great plan now. Teenagers from all around the county will love the Adventure Sports Park – I say that as a parent of two recent teenagers! There are also lots of things that families with young children, bike riders, nature lovers, gardeners, dog owners, pickleball and tennis players, baseball players and soccer fans have been asking for for years. And, there are a lot of ways that the special quiet spaces, such as those near Pine Lake, will be improved and protected.

Please fully fund parks so we can make that plan a reality. Past plans sat on the shelf and got dusty due to lack of funding. Let's not let that happen this time. Let's not let the people of Wheaton down. Please know that if you invest in that space, you are actually investing in the entire community. And Wheaton is a community that really deserves some love and attention.

Do the right thing: Support the full Parks budget request and fully fund our parks system.

Thank you

Alison Gillespie

