

My name is Jonah Meyers, and I'm speaking in favor of the Planning Board's capital budget request for the Department of Parks. I especially want to express my strong support for increased funding for natural surface trails and for related projects to get the most out of the Montgomery Parks trail system for all residents.

As a mountain biker, dad of a toddler enthusiastic about hiking, and member of Mid-Atlantic Offroad Enthusiasts (MORE), I appreciate the Parks Department's increased attention to trails in recent years but believe that adding resources for natural surface trails is money well spent.

Doubling the capital budget for natural surface trails to \$1 million a year would help:

- Add trails in equity focus areas such as the East County, and connect more neighborhoods throughout the county to the trails network.
- Upgrade existing trails to reduce erosion, improve drainage, and maintain the high quality outdoors experience that users have appreciated for decades and that became more popular during the coronavirus pandemic's surge in trail use.
- Provide a range of experiences for people with different skill levels and different outdoor interests.

In addition, I ask that the Council support added funding for related amenities and projects. In particular, I would value investments in:

The Wheaton Adventure Park, which will provide exciting opportunities for healthy physical activity in the East County. This facility will complement the recent investment in improvements to trails in and around Wheaton Regional Park and help get teenagers and young adults off the couch and into the parks.

Trails and associated infrastructure for youth races sponsored by the National Interscholastic Cycling Association. Montgomery County has three NICA teams that compete in a statewide circuit and has hosted races at Schaeffer Farms, part of the state park system. Montgomery Parks should build at least one or two trail loops that meet NICA standards and include basic camping facilities for visiting participants and their families.

Adding money to a program is always tough in a competitive budget environment but increasing the budget for trails and related facilities is the most cost-effective thing you can do to connect more people to the parks and everything they have to offer.

I want to close by saying that I support the overall Parks Department budget and urge you to reject the County's Executive's proposed cuts. We have a great park system but we can't take it for granted, and it needs continued investment to continue supporting healthy physical activity, access to nature, social connections, and a high quality of life for everyone in our community.

Thank you.