

I am Dawn Calabria, a 27 year resident of Willard Avenue in West Friendship, I appreciate the opportunity to address the Council on the County's proposed 2025 Budget and CIP Amendments, particularly the National Capital Park and Planning Commission's request.

Montgomery County Planning Board's capital program for the M-NCPPC requested \$319.7 million, a 7.9% increase over the current budget. The County Executive recommended a smaller increase of 2.3%, providing \$303 million and noted importance of improving water quality and valley stream restoration. Given existing resources and severe needs in other parts of the budget, I support this \$303 level, provided Parks increases its outreach and engages in real consultations with communities neighboring the local parks it seeks to "improve". Well planned and maintained parks are important to the livability of our county and to the health and well-being of our citizens, but so is open government acting in truly consultative processes that listen and respond to residents most immediately effected by M-NCPPC acquisitions and development projects in much loved local parks.

The agency must be willing to engage in outreach and real consultations with give and take as they engage with community and neighboring residents by providing details and cost benefit information on suggested improvements and questions raised by residents. It should not seek to impose improvements out of the blue, but seek to engage citizen residents in exploring possible improvements, whether new programs, replacements, alternatives or new construction. The agency must be prepared to publicly discuss costs, funding sources, timelines and adherence to the agency's published program standards and policies in its proposals. Parks ability to ignore zoning, noise ordinances, or health standards on its properties give it significant leeway to operate. Thus, my experience suggest the need for our elected officials to mandate true consultation and information

sharing on projects planned and constructed under M-NCPPC budget project headings like Minor New Construction Local Projects , Park Refreshers, Urban Park Elements, Planned Lifecycle Asset Replacement, etc.

In July 2022, my West Friendship Community was informed via a zoom meeting that Willard Avenue Park (WAP), our 5 acre neighborhood wooded stream park, would be “improved” by adding a sunup to sundown fenced dog park. Construction funding of reportedly \$1.2 million was assured, we were told, but only for a dog park. No prior notice or consultations with us the nearby neighbors had occurred, although the agency’s treatment of nearby Norwood Park had enjoyed months of consultations. We did not.

To our further dismay, the proposed plan for adding agency owned property at 5320 Willard placed the dog park 50 ft from a 100 year old residence and less than 200 ft from several other homes, while Parks policy stated a 200 ft separation.. Despite the significant noise threat and no real noise abatement, the plan would have threatened nearby residents enjoyment of their properties. Their plan also required demolishing the Reynold’s House, an 1898 beloved architecturally and historically significant house, owned by the County. This “Blue House” is linked to our county’s early public transit development history, the Glen Echo Trolley. The site plan provoked significant opposition and was placed on hold in 2022.

Parks’ website indicated the WAP dog park project was on hold to study the historic significance of the 1898 house, which would be rented. The house has been vacant a year. Inquiries about the timeline or result of the house study have not been answered. Yesterday, Feb.6 Park’s website noted the project hold was now until Fall 2024. Community comments raised opposition to the dog park because of noise, health concerns, its proximity to

residences and the risk of increased stream pollution, Some noted the Park needed to develop more ADA compliant entrances, wanted community gardens with raised beds seniors could use, and called for the addition of game and picnic tables in publicly visible sitting areas for children, families, and seniors as well as persons with disabilities to enjoy..

A further demonstration of the agency's lack of transparency and outreach on WAP] is the agency's continued failure to provide any information about the planned enlargement of WAP following the demolition of two adjacent county owned vacant properties at 4905 River Road and 5304 Willard Avenue (this one a boarded up eyesore) once planned for Fall 2023. Repeated inquiries about the planned use of this expensive land remain unanswered. As residents and taxpayers we would like to be consulted and able to provide input and reactions on how the enlarged park site could better meet local needs.

The silence and lack of transparency from M-NPPC on the incorporation of 5409 River Rd and 5301 Willard, plus the continued "hold" on 5320 Willard has raised serious concerns about the agency's lack of openness.. We hoped the appointment of the new Planning Board and the senior agency staff would have improved public outreach and information sharing.

In conclusion the Little Falls Association 2023 water quality monitoring report indicated serious rising levels of fecal water contamination in the stream by Willard Park. Further suggesting that Installing an intensive use like a dog park in WAP could only further contaminate the stream. But above all it would remove our neighborhood park's role as a quiet refuge from the noise and traffic of River Road and Willard Avenue.

Dawn Calabria





I urge the County Council to work with the M-NCPPC to improve public information and outreach and consultation with local park neighbors on their capitol projects.