

Council Members:

Thank you for your time – I know you're busy listening to everyone making budget requests. This is the second time you'll hear from me, and that's because I've lived in the county for 24 years this August, and like you, I care about not just *maintaining* services for our growing and diverse community but also improving and expanding them when appropriate and necessary. It is appropriate and necessary now.

The County Executive's proposed FY 2025 operating budget reduced the Parks Department's requested increase by \$4 million.

The Parks Department's operating budget funds programs, maintenance, and personnel across 419 parks and more than 37,000 acres of parkland. This year, the Parks Department budget request was to cover existing services and commitments, with a limited 1.2% increase to fund new programs and initiatives. These enhancements would have:

- Added more large and exciting events at our parks;
- Improved environmental stewardship of our natural areas;
- Increased security at our parks and trails;
- Expanded programming for the County's growing senior population;
- Improved customer service; and
- Sped up park construction projects.

However, the County Executive's proposed budget for Parks eliminates funding for these enhancements and goes even further, failing to provide even a "standstill" budget. It doesn't account for inflationary cost increases and includes no funding to operate the County's new and expanded parks scheduled to open next year, like White Flint Civic Green, Broad Run Stream Valley Park, Caroline Freeland Urban Park, and Ednor Soapstone Quarry Special Park. This means inevitable service cuts, reduced programs, and a decline in maintenance standards in other parks too.

There are trails in a park near where we live, between the Cabin John Park and the Locust Grove Nature Center, that lost some large trees during a bad storm last summer, blocking several trails we frequent. I contacted the Parks Department, and the trees were removed, opening the trails for all County residents once again. It is this budget that maintains our trails.

My kids played soccer for over a decade with MSI, where after volunteering for many years, I now work (even though our kids are off at college and no longer utilizing the fields). Attending their practices and games, I've been to many soccer fields throughout the county, and the thousands of kids who play on those fields today would like them to be well maintained, without divots, and mowed in season. You can't kick a soccer ball through grass that's up to your ankles, or knees if you're in first grade, and those divots lead to broken ankles. It is this budget that maintains our fields.

I also used to be a PTA President and Cluster Representative. For those meetings and events, we reserved space in MCPS. It is this budget that ensures prompt customer service for permits, and inquiries about facilities.

And back when our children were little, we visited countless county playgrounds multiple times. They were maintained for our children and should continue to be maintained for current and future children in Montgomery County. Again, it is this budget that ensures this happens.

Or not. It won't all happen if the Parks Department budget is cut by four million dollars.

Please reconsider these cuts and restore the modest budget request by the Parks Department.

Thank you for your support of Montgomery Parks!

Sincerely,
Wendy Calhoun