

**Testimony before Montgomery County Council  
FY25 Operating Budget Hearing  
April 9, 2024, 7:00 pm**

**Allison I. Fultz on behalf of  
Meadowbrook Foundation, Inc.**

Good evening, members of the Montgomery County Council and President Friedson, who is also my Councilmember. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the County's proposed FY 25 Operating Budget.

My name is Allison Ishihara Fultz, and I am a member of the Board of Meadowbrook Foundation, Inc. Meadowbrook is a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is education through horsemanship. With me this evening are [Jessica Leonardi - Executive Director] [Julia Creighton - Board member] [Jesse Martin - Board member] [Shelly Trimble - Board member]

We are tenants and stewards of the historic Parks Department-owned Meadowbrook Stables in Rock Creek Park in Chevy Chase, through the Parks' first public-private partnership. Meadowbrook Stables provides regular lessons throughout the year to over 300 adult and child riders. We teach complete horsemanship, so that all students develop a thorough

grounding in horse care and receive meticulous instruction in technically refined, sympathetic riding techniques.

We also offer regular programs to community-based groups, including the Girl Scouts and YMCA, to introduce children to horses through barn tours, hands-on horse care, and riding lessons. As those of us who spend time with horses appreciate, the connection between humans and equines teaches us responsibility, empathy, and provides a new lens on the world. Meadowbrook's mission is to introduce as many people as possible to this unique and mutually rewarding relationship.

Most importantly, our home is Rock Creek Park, and our facilities are open to the public during operating hours. This provides a rare opportunity for anyone to explore the grounds, visit with the horses whose stalls are open to the exterior, and observe horses relaxing with their herd mates or being ridden, depending on the time of day. We welcome non-riding visitors and it's a rare weekend when I don't have the chance to chat with passersby and introduce them to one of Meadowbrook's horses and ponies.

This gives just a small glimpse of the value of the Parks to life in Montgomery County. Being able to spend time in our Parks got us all through the pandemic. The programs offered by Montgomery Parks and affiliated organizations like Meadowbrook Stables are varied and outstanding.

In contrast to virtually all other agencies across County government, the County Executive's proposed Operating budget reduces Parks' requested increase by 2/3, or about \$4 million. This falls short of a same-services budget and would require cuts to Parks' operations, maintenance, and services budget, hampering Parks' ability to maintain its facilities and remain accessible to all County residents and visitors. In light of the proven value the Parks represent in maintaining the great quality of life we enjoy in Montgomery County, this proposal is frankly confounding.

We at Meadowbrook Stables are proud to serve as partners with the County in preserving a valuable historic resource as a living enterprise. We urge the County Council to increase Montgomery Parks' budget AT LEAST to parity on a percentage basis concomitant with Parks' sister agencies to

allow the County to fulfill its contract obligations to employees and maintain the levels of service and accessibility Parks currently provides.

Thank you for your time and we are happy to answer any questions.