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April 8, 2024

I want to make four points:

- We have an extraordinary Parks system of which we can all be proud.
- Demonstrably, the current staff and resources are not sufficient to maintain the Parks system at a level of excellence we would all like to achieve.
- Failing to give Montgomery Parks at least a same services budget will lead to further deterioration of the quality of our parks.
- Public-private partnerships should be a more valued part of our effort to achieve excellence in the face of limited public resources.

Former Parks director Mike Riley regularly referred to Shirley Povich Field, Capital Crescent Trail, and Brookside Gardens as the three crown jewels of Montgomery Parks. As the founder and president of the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club and the leading advocate on the County Council for the Capital Crescent Trail and now a board member of the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail, I know something about two of these.

Shirley Povich Field was built by our Bethesda Community Base Ball Club, and our organization has worked tirelessly to maintain its excellence for the last quarter of a century. Paving of the first leg of the Capital Crescent Trail from Bethesda Avenue to Little Falls Parkway was paid for by PEPCO. That private sector donation was used to leverage state funding for the paving from Little Falls to the District line. Not a county dollar went into the original paving of the trail.

I will just share one story to make my main point. A few years ago, the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail funded Neal Potter Plaza at the trail near River Road. Almost immediately, the park looked shabby with weeds and cigarette butts everywhere. Our coalition complained and asked for a higher level of maintenance. Didn't happen. The solution was obvious: our coalition had money in the bank. We could hire the Bethesda Urban Partnership to maintain the park. Win. Win. Win. We would stop complaining. The public would be better served. And equity would be advanced because Montgomery Parks could take the maintenance funds slated for Potter Plaza and spend them elsewhere to upgrade maintenance at another park.

When I first proposed this, I was told: "We don't do that. We have a maintenance budget. We are responsible for maintaining that park. We don't contract out." Really? Why not? You are not doing an adequate job. No one's job is going to be cut. The money will go to improving equity across the county by using the funds on another park. "We don't do that." So I went to Mike Riley and explained my proposal. He immediately agreed. And the result has been as expected: Potter Plaza has been maintained at a higher level. We at the CCCT can complain about something else. And money was available to be put to good use elsewhere.

I can tell you similar stories about Povich Field.

The folks at the top level of Parks understand partnerships. But not all the implementers do. It needs to be easier for public-private partnerships to serve the public interest and reduce the pressures on those of you who have to make these difficult budget decisions.

Please at a minimum maintain the same service budget of Montgomery Parks. And use your voices to strengthen organizations like the Parks Foundation and to encourage a deeper appreciation for the value of partnerships throughout the county government and affiliated agencies.

Win. Win. Win.