

Dear Esteemed County Councilmembers,

My name is Kelli Dominique Hudson. I've lived in Montgomery County for 7 years after relocating here from Ohio. Being new to the area, discovering the parks served not only as the main arteries but a conduit to creating a sense of community, belonging, and connection to a new place. My daughters were reacquainted with familiar sounds of carefree laughter and fun, and reassurance that they would experience normalcy of hanging outdoors with friends in a foreign place after the move.

As a passionate patron of Montgomery Parks, I wholeheartedly support the Parks Department's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request. Our parks are not just green spaces; they are vibrant community hubs that enrich our lives in countless ways. Here's why I urge the County Council to fully fund the Parks Department:

1. **Programs and Activities**:** Montgomery Parks offers a diverse range of programs and activities that cater to all ages and interests. From nature hikes to cultural events, our parks foster community engagement and well-being.
2. **Budget Reduction Concerns**:** The proposed FY 2025 operating budget reduces the Parks Department's requested increase by \$4 million. While fiscal responsibility is essential, we must also recognize the critical role our parks play in enhancing our quality of life.
3. **Existing Services and Commitments**:** Almost the entire budget request is allocated to cover existing services and commitments. However, a modest 1.2% increase is essential to fund new programs and initiatives that address the evolving needs of our growing and diverse community.
4. **Enhancements We Need**:**
 - **Exciting Events**:** Let's add more large and exciting events at our parks, creating memorable experiences for residents and visitors alike.
 - **Environmental Stewardship**:** Investing in environmental stewardship ensures the preservation of our natural areas for future generations.
 - **Security and Safety**:** Increased security at parks and trails is crucial for everyone's peace of mind.
 - **Senior Programming**:** Our growing senior population deserves tailored programs that promote health, social connections, and active living.
 - **Improved Customer Service**:** Enhancing customer service ensures that park visitors have positive experiences.
 - **Faster Park Construction**:** Speeding up park construction projects benefits the community sooner.
5. **Budget Gaps and Consequences**:**
 - The proposed budget eliminates funding for these enhancements, jeopardizing the vibrancy of our parks.

- Inflationary cost increases are not accounted for, putting additional strain on existing resources.

- New and expanded parks, like White Flint Civic Green, Broad Run Stream Valley Park, Caroline Freeland Urban Park, and Ednor Soapstone Quarry Special Park, lack operational funding.

6. Service Cuts and Maintenance Decline**: Without adequate funding, we face inevitable service cuts and a decline in maintenance standards across all parks. Our community deserves better.

I encourage the County Council to ensure full funding for our beloved parks and ensure their continued vitality!