

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council FY 2025 Budget

- Gail Melson, Montgomery Parks Volunteer

Good afternoon. My name is Gail Melson, a county resident for 30 years and a retired MCPS teacher. I'm testifying to urge the Council to fully fund Montgomery Parks FY25 budget request.

I volunteer with the Montgomery Explorers program run by the Program Access office at Montgomery Parks. It's a walking club for residents who are 55 years old or better. It's a chance for us older folks to get some exercise, learn about the parks and socialize with people on walks in the great outdoors. Our motto is: leave no one behind. We have 4 volunteers on each walk with a member of the Program Access staff with us. The walk is led by a volunteer. At the end of the pack is the volunteer sweep who makes sure that no one is left behind and that everyone gets to walk at a pace that is comfortable for them.

Our first walk was on April Fools' Day of 2021. Today, 3 years later, we have 12 trained volunteers in place. The creative and dedicated Program Access staff emails everyone a description of the walk the week before which includes the who, what, and where info along with parking and bathroom/port-a-potty availability, and whether it will be a natural or a paved trail.

It's all free, no obligations or expectations. Typically, between 40 and 50 members walk on Mondays although we have had as many as 75 walkers. A steady flow of new walkers participate each week, as many walkers graduate to lead their own walks once they've found favorite places to walk with their own friends and family.

We walk on Monday mornings, primarily in Montgomery County Parks. We have also walked along parts of the C&O Canal, on the Wilson Bridge over the Potomac River, and down the Anacostia Trail in Prince George's County. Just this morning we stopped by the Josiah Henson Museum and walked for about 3 and a half miles on the Bethesda Trolley Trail.

You can join your constituents and become a Montgomery Explorer even if it's only for one walk. On the back of this page is the QR code to get you started including info on upcoming walks. First timers get this spiffy hat. And, as mentioned, we leave no one behind, even council members.

In summary, this program focuses on the health and happiness of Montgomery County's growing numbers of senior citizens. The Montgomery Explorers program is a great example of the professional staff at Montgomery Parks running a program and managing volunteers to serve a large number of your constituents - just one reason to **fully fund Montgomery Parks FY25 budget request.**

Thank you.



The graphic is a promotional flyer for the Montgomery Explorers walking club. It features a light blue background with a white-to-blue gradient at the bottom. At the top left, the text 'MONTGOMERY PARKS' is written in a small, spaced-out font. Below this is a stylized blue sneaker with a green leafy branch growing from the side. A circular logo with a tree and the text 'MONTGOMERY PARKS M.N.C.P.P.C.' is on the side of the shoe. Below the shoe, the words 'MONTGOMERY EXPLORERS' are written in large, bold, blue and green letters. To the right of the shoe, the text 'Learn about Montgomery Explorers, a walking club for age 50+, all fitness levels.' is displayed in a large, bold, black font. Below this is the Spanish translation: 'Aprenda sobre Montgomery Explorers, un club de caminatas para mayores de 50 años, todos los niveles de condición física.' A QR code is located below the Spanish text, with the text 'Scan this QR code with your smartphone or visit mocoparks.org/Explorers' to its right. Below the QR code is the Spanish text 'Escanee este código QR con su smartphone o visite mocoparks.org/Explorers'. At the bottom left, the website 'MontgomeryParks.org' is listed. At the bottom right is a circular logo with a tree and the text 'MONTGOMERY PARKS M.N.C.P.P.C.'

MONTGOMERY PARKS

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