

Testimony to fully fund the FY27 Capital Budget and FY27-32 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

My name is Nithya Raghavan and, I am a long-time resident of Silver Spring, a volunteer at Brookside Gardens and a board member of the Friends of Brookside Gardens. The residents of this county are extremely lucky to enjoy many of our parks, numerous walking and hiking trails, excellent sports facilities, picnicking areas, lakes and the breathtaking beauty of Brookside Gardens. Our extensive park systems have ensured the physical and psychological wellness of our county residents for many years.

Reduction of the CIP reflects a decreasing priority for the parks at a time when we need the parks more than ever. Electronic and social media addiction is becoming a major societal and mental health problem. Fear and uncertainty in everyday life has become the norm. Our parks are the places where people go to think, energize and embrace the soothing spirit of the nature to heal and recover. Additionally, that our parks are free to our residents is an added bonus. However, the upkeep of this extensive asset requires funds. While the county may be facing a budget shortfall, we need a place for our residents to go where nature is the therapist. Cutting the parks budget is not the treatment for the aging park facilities and the sacred green spaces.

Key issues challenging the parks include:

- **Urgent Maintenance:** Eroding walkways and trails present safety hazards. Many of the county tennis courts are cracked and are a tripping hazard.
- **Health Concerns:** Asbestos and falling glass remediation is needed in the aging Brookside Gardens' Conservatory. A conservatory tends to be the eye candy of any public garden and it desperately needs maintenance and safety update.
- **ADA Compliance:** improved accessibility and safety in many of the aging facilities.
- **Revitalizing Features:** Replacing the Japanese tea house at is vital for community events.
- **Education and Environment:** With eroding guidelines, promoting environmental education and sustainable practices is needed more than ever.
- **Reducing** and not increasing the lapsed salary percentage, so that the extra funds could be used for facility maintenance or staffing.
- **Community Resource Support:** Our county parks and gardens provide free outdoor space that enhances the quality of life and a safe space where the county residents can gather.

While building a new facility like a skate park is laudable, ignoring the maintenance of popular but aging facilities IS NOT. Without more funding, Montgomery Parks will struggle to properly maintain and improve its myriad parks and natural resources! Please support our Parks and **FULLY FUND** its FY27-32 CIP budget. Thank you.