

Written Testimony in Support of Montgomery County Parks Code Services and Programs

Preserve and protect public ice rinks, tennis courts, and community recreation spaces

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of Montgomery County Parks core services and programs, including the public facilities that make youth sports, recreation, and healthy community life possible. I want to emphasize in particular the critical importance of the County's public ice rinks and surrounding park infrastructure for speedskating. Without these public facilities, this sport would effectively disappear for many families in our area.

For speedskating families, public rink access is not a convenience. It is the entire pathway. There are no school teams to fall back on, limited practice opportunities regionally, and no substitute for safe, affordable public ice time.

Why these facilities matter for speedskating

- Speedskating depends on access to specialized ice time. Unlike more common youth sports, there are no middle school, high school, or college teams that provide a built-in path for participation. These athletes can only train through clubs, and clubs can only function if they have access to public rinks.
- Potomac Speedskating in Montgomery County has helped develop elite athletes, including Olympians and national-level competitors. Many of those athletes begin in this local public program and train in these facilities from a young age.
- Families from other jurisdictions drive long distances just to practice here because quality speedskating ice time is so hard to find. That alone shows how valuable and rare these public resources are.
- Ice time is already extremely limited because hockey and figure skating also rely on the same facilities. In some cases, very young children have to practice as late as 11:00 p.m. simply because there are no other available hours. That is not a sign of excess capacity; it is a sign of unmet demand.

What is at stake if funding is reduced

- Reducing the budget for these parks, rinks, or related recreation assets would not merely scale back a program. For sports like speedskating, it could eliminate the sport entirely for local children.
- If public ice rinks or surrounding recreation infrastructure such as tennis courts and park spaces are put at risk, Montgomery County would lose a proven pipeline for youth development, healthy activity, and Olympic aspiration.

- These families are already self-funding a demanding sport with equipment costs, travel costs, and training commitments, all without the expectation of school scholarships or the traditional support systems available in other sports. Public facilities are the one essential piece the County can provide.
- When public recreation opportunities shrink, families are forced either to travel farther, pay more, or leave the sport altogether. That hits working and middle-class families the hardest and reduces equitable access to healthy activities.

Broader community value of parks and recreation facilities

- Public parks and recreation facilities keep young people active, engaged, and supervised in positive environments. They support physical health, mental health, discipline, resilience, and community connection.
- Well-maintained public spaces make Montgomery County a more desirable place to live. Families look for communities that invest in safe parks, accessible recreation, and meaningful opportunities for children.
- These facilities create community pride. Residents come to watch, volunteer, support local programs, and gather in spaces that are welcoming and healthy.
- Investment in parks is also investment in prevention: prevention of sedentary lifestyles, social isolation, and lost opportunities for youth who thrive when they are part of a structured, positive program.

Conclusion

Montgomery County should protect and fully support its parks core services and programs, including the public ice rinks and related recreation spaces that make sports like speedskating possible. For many children, these facilities are not optional extras; they are the only path to participation, the only place to train, and the foundation for dreams that can reach all the way to national and Olympic competition. Preserving these spaces means preserving opportunity, health, safety, and community. I respectfully urge you to protect this funding and continue investing in the public recreation infrastructure that serves families across the County.

Respectfully submitted,

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