



Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board

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Glen Echo, North Bethesda, Potomac, Rockville, and Twinbrook

August 29, 2025

The Honorable Marc Elrich
County Executive
Office of the County Executive
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Civic and Recreation Center for Downtown Bethesda - Program of Requirements (POR) Study

Dear County Executive Elrich:

On behalf of the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board (WMCCAB), I urge the County to prioritize a civic and recreation center in downtown Bethesda as part of the FY27 capital budget.

Bethesda is one of Montgomery County's most densely populated and rapidly growing communities—as you have often noted, it is the County's "economic engine" – yet it lacks a dedicated, indoor facility for recreation, wellness, and public gathering. This gap leaves residents of all ages and backgrounds without accessible, equitable space for exercise, community programs, and social connection.

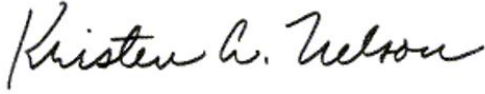
The 2017 Downtown Bethesda Sector Plan and the 2025 Minor Master Plan Amendment both call for a centrally located recreation center. Community voices strongly echo this priority, citing a lack of meeting space, limited wellness options, and the absence of a walkable, inclusive gathering place in the heart of the county's economic core.

In preparing this advocacy, WMCCAB engaged a broad range of stakeholders, including the Bethesda Urban Partnership Board, the Bethesda Arts and Entertainment Board, the Bethesda Downtown Implementation Advisory Committee, and the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce. Feedback from public meetings, business leaders, and an online survey—which drew over 1,000 positive responses—demonstrates strong public support for a hub focused on health, youth engagement, and social connection.

We believe the County can pursue creative paths forward, including developer partnerships through public amenity commitments. Peter Fosselman and I recently met with the Department of Recreation and the Department of General Services to discuss next steps. Both departments expressed interest and support.

We strongly encourage the County to initiate a Program of Requirements (POR) Study to define scope, site needs, and operational goals. Bethesda's continued success depends on ensuring residents – and businesses -- have access to the same community infrastructure found elsewhere in the county. A civic and recreation center would improve public health, expand equity, and reinforce downtown Bethesda's role as a connected, inclusive, and vibrant place to live, work, and gather.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristen A. Nelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kristen" being more prominent than the last name "Nelson".

Kristen A. Nelson
Chair
Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board

cc: Peter Fosselman, Director Regional Services
Adriane Clutter, Acting Director Recreation
Greg Ossont, Deputy Director General Services
Shawna Fachet, Division Chief Recreation Facilities
Bethesda Urban Partnership
Bethesda Arts and Entertainment Board
The Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce
Bethesda Downtown Implementation Advisory Committee

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services

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