

Countywide Recreation and Parks Advisory Board
Monday, March 24, 2025
2425 Reddie Drive, 3rd Floor, Wheaton

Board members present: Mullis, Ricci, Holeywell, Zarubin, Sparer, Flores, Hutton, Ryan, Bentley, Banda, Hudson, Bentley, Goettsch, Royster, Jacknis

Board members absent: Krauze, Delgado, Tondo

Staff present: Fasteau, Burnett, Riley, Clutter, Fachet, Samuel

Ex-Officio members present: Kellner, Ross

Michael Ricci called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. A quorum was established.

Sparer motioned to approve the March 2025 agenda. Mullis seconded. Approval was unanimous.

Hutton motioned to approve the February 2025 minutes. Goettsch seconded. Approval was unanimous.

Ricci introduced a conversation about several previously discussed topics.

Clutter and Riley described recent meetings with CUPF and MCPS leaders and staff and said MCPS recognizes the need for adjustments and re-education about the need to follow community use processes. Ricci said he received no response from MCPS to the board's previous letter outlining its concerns. Clutter said MCPS leaders said there would be an annual letter to MCPS principals about community use. Clutter said the summer has been particularly challenging for community use given staff turnover at MCPS. Clutter said she felt confident about the meeting and is keeping the issue on the minds of MCPS leaders.

Fasteau reiterated ongoing permitting challenges with MCPS and his own attempts to raise awareness of community use issues with the school district.

Hudson asked for clarification about education efforts. Clutter said operations manager Ron Maxson has pledged to share previous education materials. Kellner said there have been miscommunications from MCPS to principals in the past about dates and timelines. Kellner pledged to keep the board updated on progress.

Clutter said she raised to MCPS issues about summer camp plans and bumping of programs. Clutter said 700 families will be affected by adjustments to camp locations, and some may not be able to make it to their new locations. Clutter described 2025 as the 'bumpiest' year yet for summer camps. Solutions may include moving camps to nearby schools or moving camps around within the school building to avoid construction projects.

Ricci said he'd provide an update at the April board meeting.

Mullis provided an update on staff recognition. He said he recently met with staff to solicit ideas about the concept, and he proposed Monday, Dec. 8 at 2425 Reddie as the event location. He said the group plans to recognize 8 people and provide department leaders with the opportunity to highlight 2025 successes. He said the plan would be for elected officials to join the event. Mullis invited board members to join a group doing further planning of the event.

Bentley motioned to approve the date. Zarubin seconded. It was unanimously approved.

Ricci began a discussion about the budget, beginning with timelines:

- March 24 the board receives briefing from agencies
- April 7 to 8 the County Council receives testimony from the public, including the board
- The board will also submit a letter to the County Council
- By Memorial Day the County Council takes final action

Burnett shared budget information, calling it a “tough budget year.” Parks requested a 7.2% budget increase but only received a 3.2% increase, leaving a nearly \$5 million shortfall. He said Parks would need to make up \$3.5 million to \$4 million just to be able to do what it did this year. “We’re in a very tight spot this year,” Burnett said.

Burnett said his department is compiling a list of potential cuts and that it will “cut deep.” He noted the county’s proposed budget will make it difficult to pay for major increases in utility costs and doesn’t fully cover staff compensation COLA increases.

Additionally, Burnett said, Parks was told it would receive \$1.5 million in CIP cuts, including to projects that are already in the works. He said Parks is activating its advocates and drafting talking points for them. “It’s going to take a lot of strategy to get to the point where we can say in good conscience ‘we can maintain services and provide what we’ve provided in the past,’” Burnett said.

Riley provided an update on the Recreation budget. She said the department was, at one point, asked to examine what a 6% budget cut would look like. Some of those cuts were ultimately included in the proposed budget but not all of them. Riley said Recreation didn’t ask for new or additional funding, stating “we did well in this year’s budget - we’re doing okay.”

She warned that changes could still be coming, based on the forthcoming state budget.

She described new budget changes affecting Recreation’s ability to be self-sustaining. In the future, Recreation revenue has to be allocated and appropriated.

Riley expressed concerns about rising construction costs’ impact on the CIP budget at a time when many older facilities need a refresh.

Hutton outlined the board's advocacy processes. She encouraged members to sign up to testify to the county council on April 7 and April 8. Ricci will testify as the board's president; others can testify in their individual capacity.

Holeywell agreed to draft a letter to be sent from the board to the council and have it available for review by the board at its April 14 meeting.

Hutton and Ricci also reminded board members that if they don't want to testify in person, they can submit testimony online, email county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov, or email individual councilmembers. Holeywell suggested board members may want to post messages to their online community groups encouraging neighbors to message the council.

Flores suggested the board consider recruiting a student or youth member, including for its current vacancy.

Board members discussed themes they'll emphasize in their messaging: that cutting recreation and parks isn't cutting an "extra," it's cutting an important part of our community. They also emphasized themes of access, support, opportunities, health, creating memories, the value of these amenities to seniors, and the idea that parks and recreation are a reason people move to and stay in Montgomery County.

Ricci announced the next board meeting for April 14, tentatively scheduled for the Jane E. Lawton Community Recreation Center.

Royster motioned to adjourn, and Mullis seconded. It was unanimously approved. The board adjourned at 8 p.m.