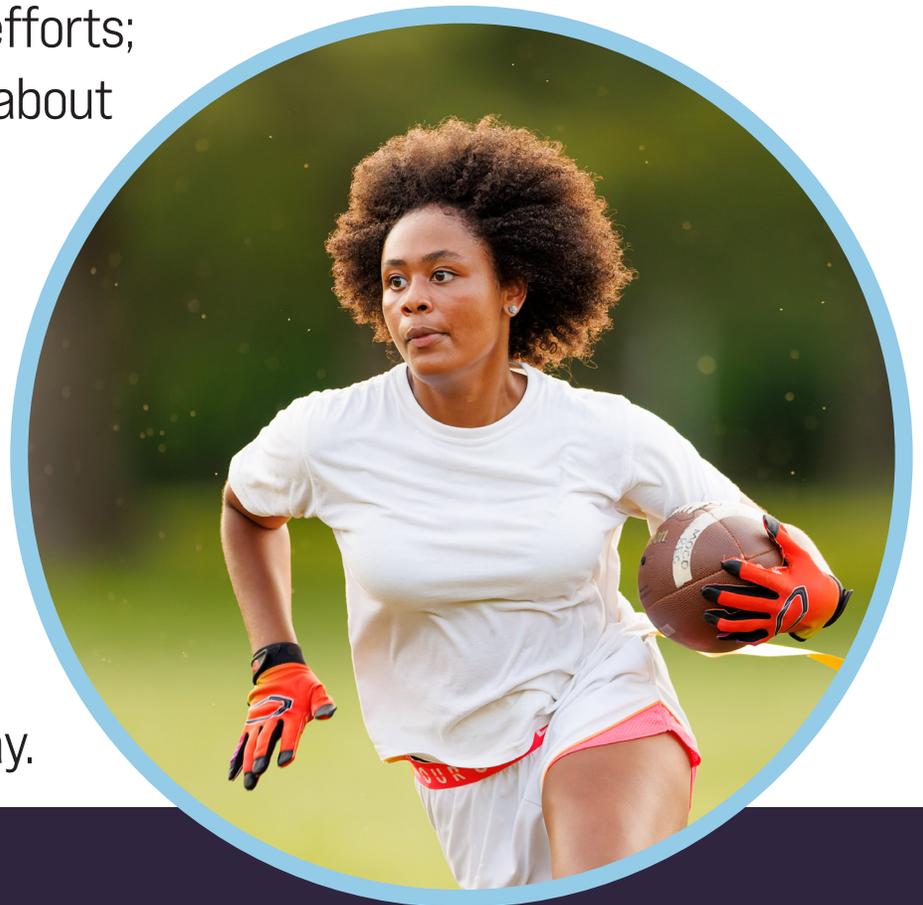




# 2025 Annual Report

Established in 2022 by the Montgomery County Council, the Montgomery County Sports Advisory Committee (SAC) continued into its second year, **establishing a mission, vision, and set of values** to guide the committee's efforts; **increasing its knowledge** about sports participation issues across the county, **making progress** to implement recommendations from its 2024 annual report; and **building relationships** with county residents and organizations along the way.



## Contents

**2** Mission, Vision, and Values

**3** Unsung Heroes Recognition Program

**4** Advocacy

**5** Community Engagement

**6** Looking Ahead to 2026

# Mission, Vision, and Values

During the first part of this past year, the SAC developed and voted to approve a mission, vision, and set of values to provide a focus and direction for the committee and its activities.



**Mission:** The Sports Advisory Committee advocates for more diverse participation in high-quality sports programming across Montgomery County by identifying and addressing barriers to access for residents, regardless of background or circumstance.



**Vision:** The Sports Advisory Committee supports Montgomery County in becoming a model for inclusive community participation where residents, regardless of background or circumstance, can thrive and achieve their full potential in sports.



**Values:** The Sports Advisory Committee values inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment as well as the strength of diverse perspectives and community engagement.

As key concepts that underpin the work of the SAC, its mission, vision, and values will also serve as a constant reminder to current and future members about why the committee exists.



# Unsung Heroes Recognition Program

The SAC—as part of its statutory responsibilities—created a new, countywide sports recognition program to recognize individuals or organizations that help expand sports participation in the County, particularly among underserved communities.

Three outstanding young coaches were honored this spring as the first recipients of the Montgomery County Sports Advisory Committee’s Unsung Hero Awards. The three recipients, chosen from 30 nominations submitted by families, athletes, schools, clubs, and colleagues, were honored at the Montgomery County Sports Hall of Fame celebration in May 2025 at the Silver Spring Civic Center.

CAPRINA PIPION-WILLIAMS

## “I got this, I can do this”

Honoree Caprina Pipion-Williams coaches Recreation Department basketball for elementary school girls in Clarksburg, Germantown, and Montgomery Village. She’s determined to become the female coach and mentor she wished she had growing up playing sports in California. Caprina’s goal for her girls “is building resilience, it’s emotional intelligence, it’s teamwork, it’s believing in yourself.” She teaches them to use the mantra, “I got this, I can do this” when facing challenges in sports, school, or in life. Caprina’s impact was especially profound for one of her girls who was badly bullied in 5th grade. “Coach took my daughter’s dark time in school and turned it around for her and for that I will forever be grateful,” wrote her mother.

MUHAMMAD ARIF WALI

## “I want them to feel they belong to this community”

Honoree Muhammad Arif Wali is an extraordinary example of how a young person can make an immediate and profound impact on their community through sports and mentoring. Arif, as everyone calls him, was born in Afghanistan and has lived in the United States for only five years. But in that short time, he’s been a positive influence on the lives of hundreds of immigrant youths in Montgomery County. His International Sports Organization, based in Silver Spring, offers a sports and schoolwork program for kids all over the County. While cricket, soccer, football and basketball have been the main attraction, Arif’s true goals are much more ambitious. “I want to make them great leaders. I want them to feel they belong to this community, that they are the future of this community,” he says.

BRETT RILEY

## “We’re all teammates, we’re all equals”

Honoree Brett Riley did not play sports growing up. But at her County high school where she’s a special education paraeducator, when no one wanted to coach the school’s corollary bocce team, she surprised herself by volunteering to manage the team and then by starting a pickleball team the next year. In corollary sports, students both with or without disabilities play together on the same teams and compete against other schools in pickleball, bocce and softball. “We are mostly a special education population, but we’re all teammates, we’re all equals,” she says. A lot of her students struggle with being flexible and making changes, she notes. “Learning it’s okay to lose, it’s okay to win, it’s okay to not have a game go exactly how you thought it would, carries over into a lot of other aspects in their lives.”



## Congratulations to our first recipients of the Unsung Heroes recognition program!

The SAC has conducted its next round of nominations for its 2026 recipients. More information about the program, including the nominations process, can be found at

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/about/sac-unsunghero.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/about/sac-unsunghero.html)

👉 2025 Unsung Heroes Recipients Caprina Pipion-Williams, Muhammad Arif Wali, and Brett Riley

# Advocacy

The SAC targeted its advocacy efforts over the past year to increase awareness about the committee and bring attention to its 2024 annual report recommendations. For example, the SAC hosted individual meetings with several Montgomery County Councilmembers to walk through its various recommendations and seek their input on how best to implement them.

## Sports Programming Directory

County Councilmembers expressed strong support for the recommendation to develop a countywide sports programming directory that would include both government-sponsored and private programs and be available online or via a mobile app. Subsequently, the Chair and Vice Chair of the SAC testified at the Montgomery County Council Fiscal Year 2026 operating budget hearings on several key issues and requested technical assistance from the county to help bring the sports programming directory to fruition.



SAC Chair Tom Cove (top left) and Vice Chair Tina Won Sherman (top right) testify before the Montgomery County Council on April 7, 2025; SAC members (bottom) met with County Councilmember Natali Fani-González; left to right: Tom Cove, Doug Remer, Amy Lopez, Natali Fani-González, Joe Hooks, Trish Heffelfinger, and Steve Solomon

## Sports Participation

County Councilmembers also emphasized the importance of better data to target efforts to increase sports participation. This aligns with the SAC’s case study participation recommendation from its 2024 annual report. The recommendation was to conduct a case study in a single Montgomery County Zip code with historically limited participation in youth sports to better understand the conditions and create and negate barriers. Relatedly, the SAC has taken steps to learn more about the role of sports in the development of the Eastern Silver Spring Communities Plan, led by a Montgomery County Planning Department team. The team is working with residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to comprehensively understand how people live, work, play and shop in their community. Additionally, SAC members visited several summer youth sports camps operated by Montgomery County Recreation, offering SAC members a chance to observe county-run programs in action.

## Ballfield Initiatives

Finally, the SAC provided input into the County Executive’s budget proposal to direct funding for synthetic turf field installations or improvements as part of its Ballfield Initiatives. Synthetic turf fields can be used as an alternative to grass fields for sport venues. The SAC supported the original Ballfield Initiatives’ funding proposal that included synthetic turf construction and renovation. The committee’s input was, in part, informed by the Montgomery County’s Office of Legislative Oversight, which issued a report in July 2024 to better understand the benefits and drawbacks of natural grass and synthetic turf fields in the county. The report found significant gaps in available research assessing the risk of synthetic turf field materials. More information about the report can be found here: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2024\\_reports/OLOReport2024-12.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2024_reports/OLOReport2024-12.pdf).

# Community Engagement

The SAC took steps to further engage the community, including youth voices across the county, about their experiences with sports in Montgomery County. Data collection and meeting participation were among these steps. This is a critical step to help inform the committee's future efforts. The committee was supported in the spring by a volunteer intern from the University of Maryland to develop this approach.

## Community Partners



The SAC invited the Montgomery County Collaboration Council to present on its work with the county and opportunities for potential partnership. The SAC dialogued with MCPS to gain a better understanding of its middle school athletics program, interscholastic and intramural programs, and how best to explore increasing student participation in these programs. The SAC also spoke about its efforts at a meeting of MCPS's Student-Athlete Leadership Council, which includes two student-athletes from each of the district's 25 high schools. The committee plans to continue conversations with MCPS, including listening sessions with MCPS's Student-Athlete Leadership Council about middle and high school athletics. The SAC is working to develop a survey to obtain the perspectives of youth on their participation in sports or lack thereof.

## Boards, Committees, and Commissions



To increase its understanding of how the county's Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCCs) operate, the SAC met with the Commissions on Aging and on Children and Youth. SAC members inquired about their operations, structure, activities, and approaches to communication. The SAC seeks to continue understanding the intersection of its work with other BCCs as well as lessons learned from their experiences about how to be an effective county entity.

**CHILDREN'S BILL OF RIGHTS IN SPORTS**



## Children's Bill of Rights in Sports

Finally, and notably, the SAC endorsed the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports. Developed with a working group of human rights and sports policy experts as part of Aspen Institute's Project Play Initiative, the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports identifies eight rights of children to close gaps in the availability and quality of sport programs. Leaders are encouraged to treat these rights as guardrails in the design of all sport activities involving youth. The SAC invited a Project Play representative to talk about the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports, its origins, and the impact it has had. Montgomery County, Montgomery County Recreation, and the cities of Gaithersburg, Rockville, and Takoma Park all endorsed the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports in October 2025.

Montgomery County has subsequently become the second county in the nation to do so. More about the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports can be found at [projectplay.org/childrens-rights-and-sports](https://projectplay.org/childrens-rights-and-sports).



Left to right: Jud Ashman, Mayor, City of Gaithersburg; Tara Stewart, Director, Department of Recreation and Parks, City of Rockville; John Webster, Recreation Manager, City of Takoma Park; Tom Cove, Chair, Montgomery County Sports Advisory Committee; Carolyn Muller, Director of Parks, Recreation, & Culture, City of Gaithersburg; Marty Stone, Program Manager, Aspen Institute's Project Play Initiative; Adriane Clutter, Division Chief, Montgomery County Recreation; Gabe Albornoz, Montgomery County Councilmember; and Izola Shaw, City of Rockville Councilmember

# Looking Ahead to 2026

As we look ahead to 2026, the US will be one of the North American hosts to the FIFA World Cup. As the international stage turns its attention to this sporting event, Montgomery County, and specifically the SAC, has the opportunity to make its mark on a wide range of issues. This includes continuing to implement recommendations from the committee's 2024 annual report while also addressing other emerging issues at the national, state and local levels that could impact access and equity of sports participation in the county.

Sports Advisory Committee monthly meeting



For more information about the Sports Advisory Committee, visit [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/about/sac.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/about/sac.html).

## Photo Credits

Page 1 — Montgomery County Parks / MNCPPC; page 2 — soccer photos by Montgomery County Recreation, ice hockey and flag football photos by Montgomery County Parks / MNCPPC; page 4 — Montgomery County Sports Advisory Committee; page 5 — Montgomery County Recreation; page 6 — Montgomery County Sports Advisory Committee.