

**Audubon Naturalist Society * Sierra Club * Anacostia Watershed Society * Greater
Goshen Civic Association * West Montgomery County Citizens Association * FORCE –
Friends of Rock Creek’s Environment * Friends of Sligo Creek * Neighbors of Northwest
Branch * Citizens to Save South Valley Park and Whetstone Run**

The Honorable Nancy Floreen
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, Maryland

April 13, 2010

Dear Council President Floreen and members of the Montgomery County Council,

On behalf of our nine organizations collectively representing thousands of citizens from the length and breadth of Montgomery County, we ask that you restore crucial funds to the Executive’s proposed FY2011 budget for the Department of Parks. While we realize that Montgomery County is in an extremely difficult fiscal situation and faces unprecedented budget cuts, it would be wrong to cut the Department of Parks’ budget through to the bone as the County Executive has proposed.

The budget reduction confronting the Department of Park’s operating budget is disproportionately larger than the reductions faced by other agencies under the County Executive. The Department of Parks was asked to cut \$14.5 million, or 17.5% below its proposed FY11 budget.

From our perspective, the Executive’s proposal fails to take into account the reality that the M-NCPPC, Department of Parks currently owns and/or maintains approximately 34,000 acres representing nearly 10% of Montgomery County’s total land area. This acreage includes a wide variety of recreational facilities as well as the county’s most significant natural and cultural resources – including environmentally sensitive stream valleys, biodiversity areas, best natural areas, and 110 standing historic structures.

Clearly, the county park system is a significant factor in the high quality of life enjoyed by Montgomery County’s residents. As such, it does not deserve the level of budget cuts proposed by the County Executive. The Executive’s proposed cuts must be restored.

This year the Montgomery County Council has approved or moved forward in approving, controversial growth plans, including for White Flint and Gaithersburg West. Whether you support or oppose these growth plans, we hope you will agree that as the County grows, we need to grow our park system to keep pace with a growing population. The severe cuts proposed to the Department of Parks’ budget are a drastic move in the wrong direction – these cuts will shrink the stewardship, maintenance, acquisition, and restoration of parkland and park facilities. The net effect, if these enormous cuts are approved, will be deterioration in our quality of life.

This is bad news for all who live in Montgomery County today – as well as those that will live here tomorrow. For if the Executive’s proposed FY11 budget is allowed to stand, it will likely take decades for the park system to fully recover. The County Executive’s recommended FY11 budget is not nearly enough to ensure continuation of a high quality park system -- a park system that is clearly an important factor in the lives of county residents.

We are aware that park staff has already made significant savings related budget cuts at least twice in the current fiscal year. In addition, park staff has pledged to take a 10-day furlough in FY 11. Only the County Council can restore funding to the Department of Parks in FY11. We strongly urge you to do so.

We have clearly recognized improved stewardship of parkland and associated recreational facilities as a result of previous Council action to improve Parks’ budgets. Protecting parks, open space, and our environment in Montgomery County is essential. Council staff is expected to publish this week a list of non-recommended cuts to the Parks budget. We ask that you restore all of these non-recommended items to the FY11 Parks budget. To do any less will be to erode the quality of life for all of Montgomery’s residents.

Yours for a healthy, vibrant and green Montgomery County,

Anne Ambler
President
Neighbors of Northwest Branch

Ginny Barnes
Environmental Chair
West Montgomery County Citizens Association

Bonnie Bell
Greater Goshen Civic Association

Diane M. Cameron
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