

Members of the Montgomery County Council,

Thank you for receiving my written testimony. I do not have a lot of technical details to go over on the budget in general, or with parks in particular, but I did want to write in to emphasize just how important county parks have been to my, and others', wellbeing, particularly in the past year.

I've always been an advocate for and user of parks, but since the pandemic began, these outdoor spaces and the open air and socially distanced gathering they provide has been more important than ever. To this day I only have one friend that I have "bubbled up with" and see indoors and unmasked, so without parks space it would have been next to impossible for me to meet up with anyone else in all but a handful of circumstances. Not all of us are fortunate enough to have yards or other private spaces to gather. While we are hopefully closer to the end than the beginning of the pandemic, this need isn't going away overnight, and even in normal times parks are a welcome oasis of calm in this vibrant, urban part of the county I have come to love so much. Our dense development provides park users, and our parks provide a relief for that same population. These two things work hand in hand.

Speaking a bit more specifically, I would also like to thank everyone involved with the shared streets program, and other similar efforts. The Newell Street closure in particular has been absolutely vital for me in the past year, and events like the campfire rentals, and more recently food trucks arriving at the space have helped make South Silver Spring feel more like a community than ever. It has provided a connection I have needed desperately for my mental health in the last year, and I can tell you I am not the only one. It is also a change I would like to see made permanent if possible. It is a wonderful compliment to Jessup Blair Park, which is a great space, but quite a distance away and across a major state route (Georgia Avenue). There are also numerous other routes for cars in the area, and no business or homes on that stretch of road, so it is a rare opportunity for a permanent closure, particularly since it would just about double the useable space at Acorn Park.

While private park space is helpful, like that at the Blairs, the loss of the pedestrian space on Ellsworth shows just how unreliable this option is, and that it is no substitute for public investment. Please continue to support these wonderful spaces in the county budget.

Thank you,

Mike English
Silver Spring, MD,