



COUNTYWIDE RECREATION & PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council

Thursday, April 8, 2021

FY 22 Operating Budget

Presented by Karen Kincer on behalf of the County-Wide Recreation and Parks Advisory Board

Hello, my name is Karen Kincer. Thank you for the opportunity to offer FY22 Operating Budget testimony on behalf of the County-Wide Recreation and Parks Advisory Board.

As we begin economic, physical and emotional recovery from the pandemic, return to normalcy is only possible if there are safe places for people to go and safe things for them to do. As we look to equity and social justice as priorities in this recovery, county services through recreation and parks represent a critical alternative for those adversely impacted by the pandemic. We need to emphasize providing as many services as possible for those who most need low and no cost options.

Funding facilities and programming is good for County residents; this funding will also pave the way for restoring many revenue streams from classes and rentals that the departments have lost during the pandemic. As such we wish to highlight several concerns with the budget as proposed.

Regarding Recreation, we are concerned that the budget for seasonal and temporary staff has been reduced. In reality, these staff make up the bulk of the working hours at our recreation centers which have an average of only 1 to 1 ½ full time employees each. Without adequate funding for seasonal and temporary staff recreation centers may have to reduce hours or not re-open, even as health metrics improve.

Failure to re-open centers, or to re-open them with limited hours may result in uneven access to programs and services across the county at a time when the pandemic has raised concerns, even amongst this body, about access and equity. We believe that recreation centers—and the programs they support—must be available in all parts of



the county, and to ensure this is the case, we request support for staffing that permits all recreation centers to open fully.

Another concern in the recreation budget is the delay in funding for some after school programming until January of 2022. This is a major problem for children and working parents. Without after school programming, many kids will be on their own without peer social interaction, guided physical activity or supervision, and some families will be further strained as they attempt to identify affordable options for after school care. Some parents may even be forced to delay their return to work. In short, access to after school childcare can be a resource for weary parents, a much-needed social outlet for their children, a benefit to struggling businesses, or a weak link in the chain that keeps families and our community mired in COVID's mud.

Over the last year, our amazing park system has been a lifeline for many in our community. Parks have given people a place they could go at any time, for free, and safely be with others. The parks gave people space to exercise, and see other humans (safely, from a safe distance). The Parks department implemented several creative new programs to encourage and facilitate participation in safe activities such as the Open Parkways Program, Drive in Movies and Picnic in the Park. While more people than ever have flocked to our parks, this requires more upkeep, to trails and other parks facilities.

After discovering and getting to know our parks during the pandemic, we believe that as we "return to normal" there will be an increased desire to attend park programs, participate in summer camps at nature centers, go to festivals and other events. Families will want to hold more parties in our picnic shelters, more weddings in our park's rental spaces and just generally celebrate more, especially in places that are affordable, and we need our park system to be up to the task.

We believe that the difficult times that County residents have experienced over the last year will lead to an unprecedented demand for services as the County begins to re-open, and we must be prepared to meet the needs of our residents. As we again look at our recovery through an equity lens, it is important that we provide our both Recreation and Parks Departments with the funds needed for maintenance of services and infrastructure that will allow services to reach residents of all ages and incomes across the county on an equitable basis.