

06 February 2026

To: Council President, Natali Fani-Gonzalez,
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Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles, At-Large,
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Fr: Deborah J. Hanley, District 5 Resident

Montgomery County Council Members,

First, I would like to thank you for your service on the Council on behalf of County residents. I realize the complexity of the budgetary process in your consideration of the Amended FY25-30 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) sustainability and the health of our County's ecosystems now and into the future.

Nature Centers' (NC) professional staff, primarily professional naturalists who work in the five NC facilities, design programs to meet these above program goals. Simultaneously, accessibility is enhanced for our County's diverse populations. In those centers which previously received capital improvements for their facilities, their programming expanded in numbers and types of programs; in the number of potential attendees; and with up-to-date program designs, which incorporates evolving interpretive content and technological tools.

One example of a critical capital improvement to consider an earmark for funding under the CIP is the plan to expand programming space and to create new office space for the staff, at both Locust Grove Nature Center and at Brookside Nature Center.

While the Locust Grove improvements were included in the prior CIP budget, implementation of those capital improvements have not materialized, thereby negatively impacting programming. I understand that some improvements require major logistical arrangements; however, some – such as a covered roof over their open deck – could be accomplished within this calendar year, providing expanded programming space during inclement weather. However, at the Brookside Nature Center, it was recently discovered that their previous staff office space (outside of the programming areas) needs to be replaced because of a mold issue which cannot be remediated.

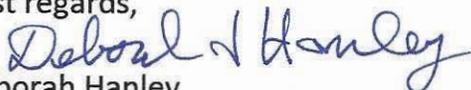
Moreover, a plan exists that will address some facility improvements that also includes improvements to the existing trails to enhance accessibility for residents with different physical and visual abilities. For instance, a trail designed for residents with low visual ability with signage and guide ropes that enable them to enjoy the wildness and natural spaces would be a major step forward in accessibility.

Another example of a capital improvement that would also improve access to residents with physical challenges would be to improve and expand the pond boardwalk at Brookside Nature Center, which would include high tech and interactive signage to enhance the learning and enjoyment for all residents visiting the pond.

I am sure that every family that has not been able to participate in an over-booked program, or has had a program cancelled for lack of inside space during inclement weather, would be grateful for improvements that enable them to enjoy expanded, enhanced and increased outreach for those programs.

In these challenging times, I appreciate your consideration for an earmark for capital funding of the Nature Centers – equally important to other capital improvements in the Montgomery Parks system.

Best regards,



Deborah Hanley

Montgomery County Maryland Master Naturalist