



February 5, 2020

## Testimony on the CIP Budget

Regarding \$21.7 million reduction from Montgomery Parks request  
Kit Gage, Advocacy Director, Friends of Sligo Creek

The parks of Montgomery County are not simply some trees and grass and playing fields. They are a complex interaction of nature and people, and cars and other vehicles, and pets, and the surrounding suburbs. The interplay is complicated, and it is difficult and challenging to maintain them.

To do this takes funds and expertise. Cutting \$21 million dollars from the Montgomery Parks CIP budget is precisely the wrong response to the combined onslaught of heavy use, environmental threats and climate change. Recent scientific studies confirm the critical positive impact on mental and physical health of those who live near and use parks. Parks keep us healthy; we need to keep them healthy as well.

The wear and tear on an old park system requires constant routine maintenance as well as significant renovation projects. I just called in a request to replace rotted boards on pedestrian bridges in Sligo Creek Park (to keep people and animals from falling into the holes – obviously critical). If these proposed cuts are executed, Parks would have to reduce its infrastructure spending by \$1.5 million. Of larger projects, improvements to Brookside Gardens would be delayed by this budget cut.

Sligo Creek Park is a long and mostly very narrow park that surrounds a skinny little creek. This means its viability is consistently threatened by encroaching stormwater, and invasive plants. These issues challenge health of trees, shrubs and native plants, and animals, birds, insects' ability to survive. Cuts to Parks in its efforts to acquire open space – often adjoining a park – would limit efforts to make Sligo a more healthy place by adding depth to the park.

Sligo is in some ways the canary in the mine of Montgomery Parks. It is incredibly well loved by those who live near and enjoy and help it. More than most parks, its people represent a very diverse group measured by race, ethnicity, and income – making it arguably more important to those perhaps less able to get to other parks, and a priority for the county to keep it in good shape. While it may be a priority, it is not unique. Many of our parks are stream valley parks that face the peculiarities of these skinny areas. And of course there are other parks with similar populations and challenges.

Montgomery County's parks are the lungs of the county, and they contribute substantially to our county, heart and soul as well. Please do not stifle them by approving this drastic cut.

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