



MONTGOMERY PARKS

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
2425 Reedie Drive | Wheaton, MD 20902
MontgomeryParks.org

MCPB Date: 3/26/26
Agenda Item #5

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 20, 2026

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Miti Figueredo, Director of Parks *mf*
 Darren Flusche, Deputy Director of Administration *DF*
 Gary Burnett, Deputy Director of Operations *Gary Burnett*
 Shuchi Vera, Chief, Management Services Division *SV*

FROM: Kate Bentley, Budget Manager, Management Services Division *KB*
 John Hamman, Deputy Budget Manager, Management Services Division *JH*

SUBJECT: Department of Parks FY27 Operating Budget – CE Recommended Budget Strategy

Staff Recommendation

Approval to transmit the Tiered Non-Recommended Reductions to the County Council for the FY27 Park Fund operating budget along with a change to the FY27 requested transfer from the County General Fund to the MCPS Ballfield Maintenance Special Revenue Fund.

County Executive’s Recommended Budget for the Park Fund

The Parks Department (the Department) requested a Park Fund increase of \$8,795,887, which is a 6.3% increase over the FY26 Adopted Budget. The County Executive’s Recommended Budget included \$5,641,079, or a 4.0% increase. This leaves a shortfall of \$3,154,808. In response to the County Executive’s Recommended Budget, the Parks Department has identified \$46,470 in upfront cuts, Tier 1 Non-Recommended Reductions totaling \$2,669,348, and Tier 2 Non-Recommended Reductions totaling \$438,990.

SPECIAL REVENUE FUND REDUCTION AND UPFRONT CUTS

Upfront Reductions and Cuts	Funding
MCPS Ballfield SRF – General Fund Transfer	342,337
Park Fund - Water Quality Protection Fund	46,470

MCPS Ballfield Maintenance Special Revenue Fund

The County Executive’s Recommended Budget provided full funding for the Department's request of \$882,762 in additional revenue to support maintenance costs for specific MCPS ballfields. This increase was primarily driven by projected expenses related to rebidding the maintenance contract, which was due to expire at the end of 2025. Upon conclusion of the bidding process, actual costs were lower than anticipated. Consequently, the Department is reducing both its expenditure and revenue requests for this Special Revenue Fund. This adjustment will save the County \$342,337 by decreasing the transfer from the General Fund resulting in a final transfer amount of \$2,940,427, down from \$3,282,764.

Water Quality Protection Fund

The County Executive’s Recommended budget raised Water Quality Protection Fund (WQPF) revenue by 6%, which funded all but \$46,470 of Parks’ requested \$324,740 in WQPF funding. This is the only immediate upfront cut that Parks is making to the Park Fund in response to the Recommended Budget. We anticipate absorbing the cost of this cut by delaying the implementation of a new stormwater management facility maintenance contract. In view of this reduction, the total WQPF funding in FY27 for the Park Fund will be \$4,916,110, down from \$4,962,580.

TIER 1 – NON-RECOMMENDED REDUCTIONS

The Department’s FY27 Proposed Budget was intentionally streamlined in light of projected fiscal constraints at the County level. Notably the FY27 Proposed Budget request of 6.3% is within half a percent of the FY26 Adopted Budget increase of 5.8%. Our FY27 submission does not seek funding for additional positions or new initiatives but focuses solely on essential items required to maintain our current service level. Consequently, there is limited flexibility for reductions within our request, as it covered only core necessities.

The chart below outlines the Tier 1 Non-Recommended Reductions or Parks’ known operating commitments with detailed information about each line item provided in the following narrative.

Tier 1 – Non-Recommended Reductions	Funding
Salary Lapse Reduction	1,409,239
Risk Management	392,877
Operating Budget Impact (OBI)	274,810
Contractual Increases	195,633
Inflationary Increases	288,347
Utilities/Telecommunications Costs	108,442
Tier 1 Total	2,669,348

Salary Lapse Reduction - \$1,409,239

The Department has prioritized its FY27 budget request to ensure base budget needs, both non-personnel and personnel, are addressed. To this end, the Department proposed reducing its budgeted lapse rate to 8%. The concept of lapse is incorporated into public sector budgets to account for typical staff vacancies and natural attrition, helping ensure that overall spending remains within program-level appropriations. The Department currently has a budgeted lapse requirement of 10%, meaning about 10% of our positions, previously approved

by Council, are not funded. At the time of this writing, the Park Fund actual vacancy rate is 10.4%. This means that the Department is currently unable to hire for approved positions.

Prior to FY19, the budgeted lapse rate ranged between 6.5% and 7.1%, depending on staffing levels and hiring fluctuations. From FY20 to FY23, the budgeted rate was gradually raised to 7.5% to reflect increased vacancies related to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the Proposed FY24 Budget, the lapse rate was set to increase to 9% due to exceptionally high vacancy rates seen in FY22 and FY23. During the budget defense and reconciliation process, the rate was further raised to the current 10%.

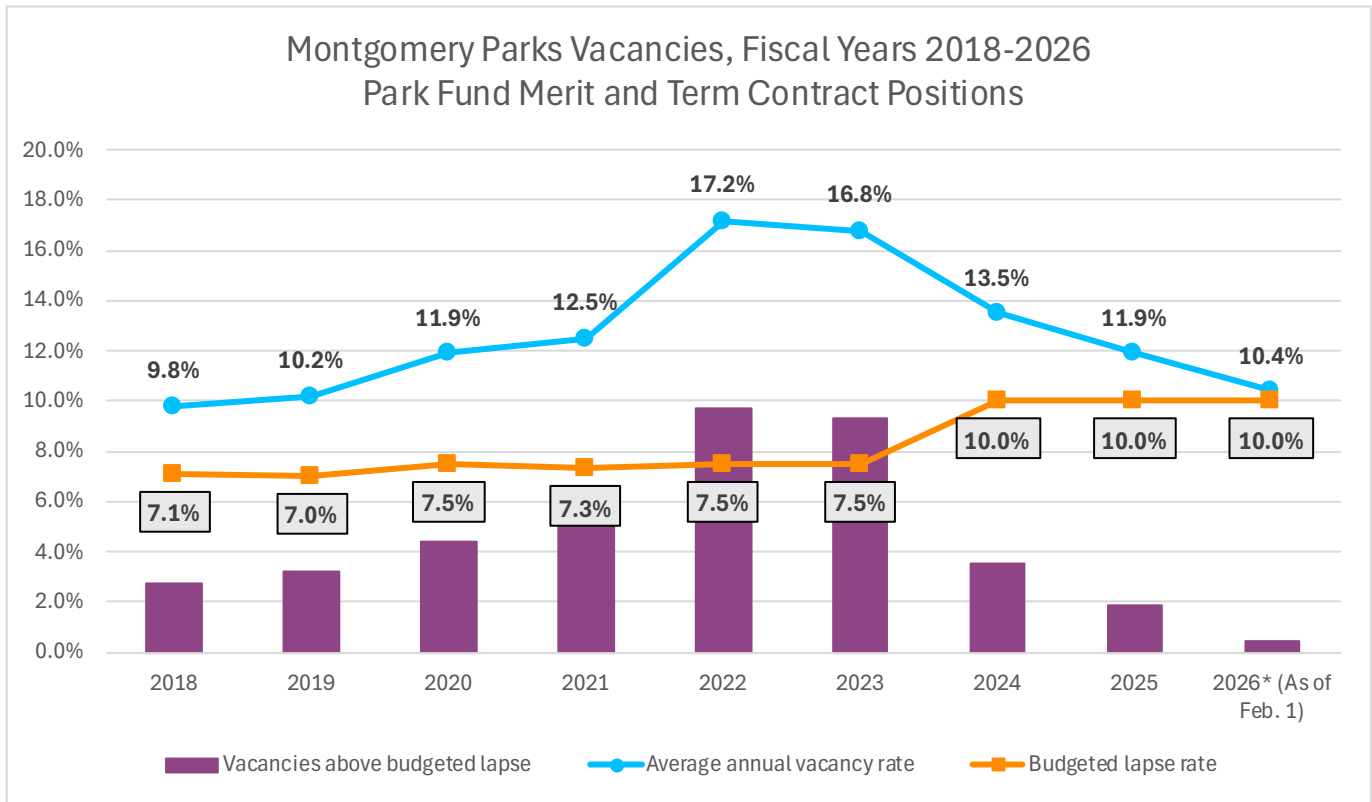


Figure 1 - MC Parks Vacancy Rate vs Lapse Rate and Vacancy Percentage Above Lapse

In FY27 terms, the 10% lapse rate equates to 83.4 workyears that cannot be filled across the Department. Since FY24, there has been notable progress made in filling vacancies. Now that the Department has reached the pinch point between the budgeted lapse and vacancy rates, the magnitude of approved positions that cannot be hired has created strain on the Department’s ability to operate and has driven up costs. As of the most recent pay period, the Department has exceeded its FY26 overtime budget of \$1.2 million by nearly \$50,000. This number will increase as spring activities continue to require overtime coverage. There are also increased costs associated with contracted work where staff cannot meet essential service needs. Contracted costs are significantly more expensive than staff provided services and are often not performed to the same level of quality. Most notable for existing personnel is the impact on staff morale. Staff are required to take on additional duties to cover for vacant roles on their teams. In operations roles, many staff are physically impacted by the additional work required. These issues threaten to become systemic if the Department cannot lower the budgeted lapse. Also, not being able to fill these vacancies prevents us from tapping into a

highly qualified candidate pool created by recent Federal Government layoffs. Examples of the impacts of individual positions are provided below.

Vacancy: 5 Park Police Officers

Impact: The Montgomery County Park Police division operates 24/7 with 98 full-time officers, while maintaining essential services. Officer positions help strengthen patrol coverage, but staffing shortages reduce proactive foot and bike patrols within our parks and trail systems. Officers are instead required to remain in or near their vehicles to respond to calls immediately. Additionally, officers are unable to ride bikes on the nearly 300 miles of trails, which allows them to be more visible and interactive within the community. In 2025, officers handled nearly 200,000 calls for service, up from 2024. To manage staffing shortages, overtime is offered or officers are reassigned from specialty units to cover patrols which limits specialized patrols (e.g., horse, motorcycle, ATV, and boat) as well as attendance at community events.

Vacancy: Natural Surface Trails Maintenance Worker

Impact: Operating with one fewer trail worker has delayed bike park and trails projects. There will likely be significant delays in the completion of the Ten Mile Creek Trail that would link Black Hill Regional Park and Little Bennett Regional Park. This connection is one of the top priorities of the 2016 County Wide Park Trails Plan. Additionally, our capacity to begin construction of the Carson Farm Bike Park, our fourth bike park, will be severely diminished.

Vacancy: Museum Specialist, Education Program Manager at Josiah Henson Museum and Park

Impact: The vacancy in the full-time Education Program Manager position at the Josiah Henson Museum & Park directly limits the museum's ability to manage and deliver high demand group tours and educational experiences. The absence of this key role forces the museum to decline large group tour requests, affecting service to returning school groups and adult audiences. Since the beginning of January there has been a 30% drop in tours provided. In addition, the History Hours lecture series has been halved and outreach programs, like in-school visits and staff participation in public events, have been paused for lack of staff availability.

Vacancy: Natural Areas Horticulturalist and Vegetation Field Crew Member

Impact: Because vegetation management activities require staff to work in pairs for safety, the loss of two skilled team members has immediately cut the team's productivity in half. Essential non-native invasive plant control and habitat management work cannot be completed at expected levels without a fully staffed, trained crew. As a result, non-native, invasive plant management aimed at community enhancement was eliminated at Hoyles Mill Conservation Park, Little Bennett Golf Course, Little Bennett Regional Park, Meadowside Nature Center, Rock Creek Regional Park, and Wheaton Regional Park and halved Serpentine Barrens Conservation Park. Furthermore, non-native, invasive plant management projects within Conservation Management Units were reduced at Black Hill Regional Park, Blockhouse Point Conservation Park, Cabin John Regional Park, Cabin John Stream Valley (units 1 & 2), Hoyles Mill Conservation Park, Little Bennett Regional Park, Muddy Branch Stream Valley (unit 2),

Rachel Carson Conservation Park, Rock Creek Regional Park, Royce Hanson Conservation Park, and Serpentine Barrens Conservation Park.

Vacancy: Horticulturist and Horticultural Support Technician

Impact: The Horticulture Services team received these two positions in FY26 through Operating Budget Impact requests. These roles are essential for supporting the upkeep of newly developed or renovated parks, including Carroll Knolls Local Park, Long Branch–Garland Neighborhood Park, Ovid Hazen Wells Recreational Park, Bottleworks Lane Urban Park, Springfield Park, and Stonehedge Local Park.

Vacancies in these positions will lead to reduced maintenance and diminished plant health of some of the more visible and aesthetic amenities of these parks including landscape flowerbeds.

Vacancy: Tree Worker/Climber

Impact: Currently, 2-3 crews can be deployed daily; full staffing would allow 3-4 crews, enabling timely hazard response and maintenance cycles. Montgomery Parks aims to complete 85% of high-risk tree mitigation within 30 days and medium-high risk within 90 days per industry standards. In FY25, 79% of high-risk and 73% of medium-high risk tasks met these goals, but in the first half of FY26, this dropped to 69% and 61%, respectively. In 2025, only 46% of targeted parks received preventative care. Failure to meet these targets increases safety risks, emergency costs, and hastens tree decline, leading to more frequent and costly removals. Park patrons may see slower response times to hazardous trees and downed limbs, more frequent temporary closures of trails, playgrounds, and other areas while hazards are addressed, and more unplanned disruptions from emergency tree work after storms. Over time, reduced preventative care can also lead to declining tree health and canopy loss—meaning fewer large, healthy trees that provide shade and improve park comfort—along with more visible tree removals.

Vacancy: 17 Senior Parks/Facilities Maintenance Worker positions across Cabin John, Green Farm, Little Bennet, Meadowbrook, MLK, Olney Manor, Rock Creek, South Germantown, Wheaton Areas

Impact: The Council approved \$100,000 of funding for Parks' new Park Facelift program in FY26. These funds are used to purchase supplies to refurbish park amenities across the park system. Without enough park maintenance workers needed to utilize these funds, Facelift projects often must be completed with contractors, at higher costs, which reduces the number of projects that can be completed and negates much of the advantage of this program. Ongoing staff shortages will result in slower responses and a decline in service quality across all public parks and facilities. Tasks such as mowing athletic fields, maintaining common areas, lining and preparing sports fields, repairing trails, and removing trash will be delayed or occur less often. Cleaning restrooms and performing regular upkeep will also be impacted, making public spaces less safe and enjoyable. These cutbacks will be apparent, with more signs of wear, unreliable amenities, and longer wait times for issues like fallen trees or overflowing bins to be addressed. In addition, to continue supporting our highest-use facilities during peak seasonal demand, staff must be reassigned to prioritize urban parks and regional and recreational parkland. As a result, many well-loved neighborhood and local parks are experiencing reduced or delayed servicing, limited primarily to essential functions such as mowing, basic

maintenance, and trash collection. The Department maintains 156 local parks, 98 neighborhood parks, and 40 neighborhood conservation areas.

Across the system, delays in both routine and preventive care will reveal themselves through worsening playgrounds, fields, and buildings. Visitors will see that grounds maintenance happens less often and repairs take longer, which can reduce their enjoyment and feelings of safety in these community spaces. These difficulties are significant for people who depend on parks for recreation and relaxation.

Given these challenges, the Department proposes reducing the lapse rate to 8%. This change would lower the number of lapsed workyears to 70.6, enabling divisions to hire an additional 13 positions. The expectation is that, by lowering the lapse rate and allowing for appropriate hiring, the vacancy rate will stabilize closer to the lapse rate, enabling more routine hiring and preventing large year-end spending balances. The Department will continue to review the lapse rate, comparing it to a rolling vacancy average to keep the rates aligned.

Risk Management - \$392,877

The County Executive's Recommended Budget covered just over half of the Department's Risk Management request. The remainder is a Tier 1 item for restoration. This fund is closely related to compensation because it covers Workers' Compensation claims for Parks staff. There has been a steady rise in Workers' Compensation claims over the last few years. Of particular note is the increase in indemnity claims, which climbed from 37% to 47% of all claims in FY25. Indemnity claims are more costly due to the need for wage replacement and higher medical expenses. Furthermore, the growth in wage levels and ongoing medical cost inflation have contributed to the overall increase in costs for the fund. This fund must be properly funded to ensure the Department's existing staff complement, including Park Police, is covered.

The fund also covers insurance claims and losses. Historically, the need for increased funding has been largely driven by significant insurance claims, such as those resulting from the Greenbriar Local Park playground arson incident and tree damage at the Cabin John Maintenance Yard. Recently the Worker's Compensation costs have been the main cost driver, but catastrophic losses cannot be anticipated. If this fund is not properly funded, the Department will not have the capacity to cover any future catastrophic losses. The next Greenbriar arson will result in a permanently closed playground, due to lack of funding for repairs or replacement.

Operating Budget Impacts (OBI) - \$274,810

Operating Budget Impact (OBI) refers to the costs required for the operation, maintenance, and policing of newly constructed or expanded parks. The process of acquiring and developing parkland is primarily conducted through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). As new facilities are added, it is essential to secure additional resources each year. The FY27 list of parks requiring OBI include Cabin John Regional Park Power Line Trail, Dalewood Drive Local, Greenwood Local, Long Branch Local Park, Rock Creek Regional Park Picnic Area #2, Rosemary Hills-Lyttonsville Local Park, Valley Mill Special Park, and Woodside Urban Park. Without these resources, existing staff and funding must be stretched across a growing number of facilities, resulting in a reduction of service levels. Without OBI, the condition of these new and expanded parks, facilities, and trails will quickly deteriorate.

Increases for Contractual Obligations - \$195,633

The Department manages a range of contracts that encompass services such as maintenance, tree removal, custodial duties, office support, and software maintenance and licensing. A significant number of these agreements are structured with escalation clauses that adjust rates according to movements in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The Department continues to experience notable increases in expenses related to both contractual obligations and the procurement of goods. Vendors supplying these services and products have raised their prices in response to higher operational costs, many of which are driven by tariffs. As a result, the Department must allocate additional resources to meet these rising financial commitments and maintain essential services. Not funding these additional costs will effectively result in a reduction to the Department's base budget. Basic services patrons expect in parks will be reduced, meaning fewer portable toilets, fewer trees pruned, fewer custodial and pest control services, and deteriorating amenities due to lack of repair and maintenance contracts.

Inflationary Increases for Supplies and Materials, Services and Capital Outlay - \$288,347

The Department is requesting an increase in funding for supplies and materials, non-contractual services, and capital outlay to address the impacts of inflation and rising costs across essential operational categories. This request is necessary to ensure the Department can continue to support its programs and services without disruption.

This funding covers a broad range of needs, including vehicle parts, custodial supplies, security cameras, maintenance equipment and supplies, computer and communications supplies, uniforms, horticultural supplies, and various other miscellaneous supply items. Recent supplier price hikes have made it more expensive for the Department to purchase what it needs.

Just in the last few weeks, the Department has seen pricing shoot up for many essential supply items. This means that this funding may well be insufficient to cover the increased costs. Fuel costs in particular have skyrocketed due to market fluctuations. If this additional funding is not restored, cost increases could further limit the Department's ability to deliver essential services. This could look like unsafe playground surfaces due to a shortage of wood fiber, deteriorating athletic fields due to issues procuring seed and aeration tines, and reduced custodial coverage due to a lack of cleaning supplies.

Collectively, these funding requests are designed to ensure the Department can continue to provide quality services and uphold safety standards amid changing economic conditions.

Utilities and Telecommunication Costs - \$108,442

The Department is facing ongoing increases in utility costs, particularly in water and sewer expenses, due to a general rise in utility rates. Without restoration of this funding, water utility services would be significantly affected. This could lead to discontinuation of some water utilities, such as irrigation for athletic fields, water fountains, or watering for landscapes, horticultural areas, and community gardens.

TIER 2 – NON-RECOMMENDED REDUCTIONS

In reviewing the items not covered under the County Executive’s Recommended Budget, staff reviewed non-personnel Major Known Commitments based on urgency of funding need. All the contractual increases included in Tier 2 are important and necessary cost escalations. However, those pushed to Tier 2 are those that can be reasonably deferred or partially funded in FY27. The chart below outlines the Tier 2 Non-Recommended cuts for Parks’ known operating commitments with detailed information about each line item provided in the following narrative.

Tier 2 – Non-Recommended Reductions	Funding
Contractual Increases	307,366
Inflationary Increases	99,804
Chargebacks	31,820
Tier 2 Total	438,990

Inflationary Increases for Contractual Obligations - \$307,366

The contract escalations in Tier 2 are those that can be reasonably deferred or partially funded in FY27 because these contract renewals are scheduled in the last quarter of the fiscal year. To achieve this reduction, the contracts will be co-terminated, or partially funded, with full funding requested in FY28, likely at a higher cost due to compounding escalation.

Inflationary Increases for Supplies and Materials, Services and Capital Outlay - \$99,804

These inflationary increases are necessary to ensure the Department can continue to support its programs and services without disruption. As mentioned earlier, many of the inflationary items included in Tier 1 are items that have already experienced increased costs which have affected service delivery and coverage. These Tier 2 items are equally important, but the Department will be able to purchase a portion of the required supplies and equipment or to push the purchasing of these items into the following fiscal year after requesting full funding for FY28. These increases range from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars and are spread across more than 40 individual budget lines across the department.

Chargebacks - \$31,820

This portion of the Department’s chargeback request is intended to decrease the budgeted CIP chargebacks for the Park Development Division. The reduction of the Department’s dependence on CIP funding to cover staff costs remains a long-term goal. However, in view of budget constraints, this item has been pushed to Tier 2 because it is not critical for continued service delivery.

Summary

Staff are requesting approval from the Planning Board to transmit the Tiered Non-Recommended Cuts to the County Council for the FY27 Park Fund operating budget along with a change to the FY27 requested transfer from the County General Fund to the MCPS Ballfield Maintenance Special Revenue Fund.











MCPB 2026 0326- MC Parks CE Rec Budget Strategy - Final Reviewed

Final Audit Report


2026-03-20


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