URGENT COMMUNITY CAPITAL BUDGET REQUEST

Prioritizing an Accessible Gwynns Falls Promenade and Connected Trail System

Connecting Gwynn Oak Park, Woodlawn Village, and Surrounding Neighborhoods, Woodlawn Library, Woodlawn High School, and local businesses

To: Baltimore County Executive, County Council, & Capital Budget Review Committee

We are writing as residents, community leaders, families, seniors, and neighbors to request that Baltimore County **move up and prioritize funding for an accessible waterfront promenade and connected pedestrian and bicycle trail system along the Gwynns Falls**. This request would build in traffic calming through a redesign of Gwynn Oak Avenue (no longer designated as a state road) and provide safe passage of pedestrians from Gwynn Oak Park to Woodlawn Village. This need was also immediately apparent to the TAP Panel, who assessed Woodlawn Village last week, and provided recommendations for road redesign and a pedestrian promenade in their report. Extending the plan to include the new Woodlawn Library, high school, and up to Security Blvd would improve safety and build upon plans already in place, improve neighborhood connectivity, and could ultimately connect to the Red Line. An attached shared bike/walking trail looping around the Gwynns Falls would not only provide a safe outdoor space for recreation, improving the physical and mental health of residents, but would be a draw for visitors, boosting the economic development of Woodlawn Village.

We are asking that this project be elevated in the County's capital budget priorities as a matter of **urgent public safety, not simply a future recreational enhancement. The risk to our residents is real, immediate, and growing.**

A Growing and Urgent Public Safety Crisis

Car crashes on Gwynn Oak Avenue are occurring with alarming frequency—often more than once a week. At the same time, the number of pedestrians and cyclists using this corridor is increasing, particularly following the reopening of Gwynn Oak Park and the addition of its new playground.

Families from surrounding neighborhoods are attempting to reach the park on foot, often with young children and toddlers in strollers, while navigating what has become a dangerous speedway. Drivers jockey for position at high speeds, frequently on blind curves and pinch points, creating an extremely dangerous environment for anyone attempting to cross or travel along the road.

Taking your children to a neighborhood park should never become a dangerous, life-or-death decision.

The situation is becoming even more concerning as economic pressures make car ownership increasingly unaffordable for many households. We have observed a significant increase in pedestrians and cyclists traveling to and from businesses in Woodlawn Village and along Security Boulevard, people going to and from the Woodlawn Senior Center, Woodlawn High School, and commuters going to and from MTA stops. These are not simply recreational users; they are residents trying to access everyday necessities, community resources, education, employment, local businesses, and public transportation.

Recent incidents underscore just how serious this situation has become:

- **Last week:** A vehicle crashed in front of the Calico Cat Cafe while children were playing in the parking lot during a family community event.
- **Later that same day:** A three-car collision occurred on the next block of Gwynn Oak Avenue. Multiple victims were bloodied and taken to the hospital.
- **The following day:** Another multiple-vehicle crash occurred directly in front of Gwynn Oak Park. Ambulances again transported victims to the hospital.
- **Last month:** A fatal crash occurred on Gwynn Oak Avenue as a longtime patron was leaving a restaurant in Woodlawn Village.
- **This past summer:** A resident of the Graystone Community was struck and killed while walking home from the bus stop on Security Blvd.

These incidents are not isolated inconveniences. They are warning signs of a dangerous transportation environment that is failing to keep pace with the needs of our growing and increasingly active community.

We cannot wait until another child, pedestrian, cyclist, or senior becomes a casualty before taking meaningful action.

A Practical Investment in Safety, Connectivity, and Equity

The proposed Gwynns Falls promenade offers an opportunity to address this growing problem while creating a lasting community asset.

An accessible, off-road pedestrian & bicycle route would connect several neighborhoods to Gwynn Oak Park, Woodlawn Village, the Senior Center and Community Center, with a continuous loop around the Gwynns Falls, through the cemetery and surrounding parklets.

This would provide residents with a safer alternative to navigating dangerous roadways, and create an inviting place for people of all ages and abilities to walk, bike, roll, exercise, and connect with one another.

The project is especially important for:

- Children and families walking to Gwynn Oak Park and its playground.
- Seniors accessing the Senior Center and nearby community resources.
- People with disabilities who need accessible routes and safe opportunities for outdoor mobility.
- Residents who cannot afford a vehicle and depend on walking, biking, or other forms of transportation.
- Students and families traveling to and from Woodlawn High School.
- Local businesses that depend on safe pedestrian access and a vibrant, connected community.

Safe access to recreation, community resources, and local businesses should not depend on whether someone owns a car.

Reclaiming and Celebrating Our Greatest Natural Asset

For decades, this part of West Baltimore County has experienced significant disinvestment and neglect. While other parts of the county benefit from beautiful, well-maintained waterfront trails and recreational amenities, our community has been left with an underutilized and deteriorating natural resource.

We are fortunate to have the Gwynns Falls running through our community. Yet, rather than being a source of pride, it has too often become an eyesore, with accumulated trash, sediment, and pollution compromising its beauty and environmental health. **This is an extraordinary asset that we are squandering.**

We deserve the same investment in beautiful, accessible public spaces that other communities throughout Baltimore County enjoy. Restoring and celebrating the Gwynns Falls would demonstrate that our neighborhoods matter and that every resident deserves access to safe, attractive, healthy outdoor spaces.

A thoughtfully designed promenade and trail system would encourage environmental stewardship, restore community pride, attract visitors, and provide an opportunity to reconnect residents with the natural beauty that exists right in their own backyards.

An Opportunity for Innovation and Community Partnerships

With its strategic location near the Woodlawn Senior Center and Community Center, this project could also become a hub for accessible transportation and intergenerational recreation.

We envision opportunities to partner with these facilities to develop:

- A community bike closet with bicycle rentals and loans, including adaptive bicycles for seniors and people with disabilities, allowing families to try different styles of bicycles and adaptive equipment to find what best meets their needs.
- Bike safety, maintenance, and repair clinics.
- Programs that encourage children, adults, and seniors to become more confident walking, biking, and navigating their community.

These partnerships would make the promenade more than a trail. They would create opportunities for healthier lifestyles, greater independence, social connection, and reduced reliance on automobiles.

Over time, providing safe and accessible infrastructure can help residents become more comfortable walking, biking, and using mobility devices for everyday transportation.

The Economic and Community Benefits

This investment would have far-reaching benefits for the entire Woodlawn and Gwynn Oak community:

- **Public safety:** Provide an alternative to dangerous roadways and reduce conflicts between vehicles and vulnerable road users.
- **Health and wellness:** Improve physical and mental health through accessible outdoor recreation and exercise.
- **Equity and accessibility:** Ensure that residents of all ages, incomes, and abilities have access to safe transportation and recreation.
- **Economic development:** Attract visitors, increase foot traffic, and support businesses in Woodlawn Village and surrounding commercial areas.
- **Environmental stewardship:** Restore and highlight the Gwynns Falls as a valued natural resource.
- **Community connection:** Link neighborhoods, parks, schools, libraries, community facilities, and local businesses.

- **Community pride:** Replace decades of neglect with a beautiful, welcoming public space that residents can enjoy and take pride in.

Our Request: Make This a Capital Budget Priority Now

We respectfully ask Baltimore County to:

1. **Move this project forward in the capital budget timeline** and prioritize funding rather than allowing it to remain a long-term recreational concept.
2. Allocate funding for the necessary planning, engineering, environmental assessments, design, and construction of an accessible Gwynns Falls promenade and connected pedestrian and bicycle trail system.
3. Coordinate with County agencies, transportation officials, parks and recreation, environmental partners, and the community to identify the most effective and timely implementation strategy.
4. Evaluate immediate pedestrian and traffic safety improvements along Gwynn Oak Avenue and connecting streets while the longer-term promenade and trail system is being developed.

We recognize that a project of this scope requires planning, coordination, and investment. However, the urgency of the safety concerns demands that planning begin now, with meaningful interim safety measures implemented while the larger project moves forward.

Our community should not have to choose between accessing its parks, schools, businesses, and community resources and risking its safety.

We have an opportunity to transform a dangerous and neglected corridor into a connected, accessible, and beautiful community asset. We can protect our residents, improve our environment, strengthen our local economy, and create a place where children can safely ride their bikes, seniors can enjoy a walk, families can spend time outdoors, and neighbors can connect. We have waited decades for this kind of investment. With the reopening of Gwynn Oak Park, the new playground, the new Woodlawn Library, and the revitalization of Woodlawn Village, the time to act is now.

Please do not wait for another tragedy to make this a priority. Our residents' safety, health, and quality of life deserve immediate attention and investment.

Respectfully submitted by Dawn Seestedt and Friends of Larchmont,

On behalf of the residents, families, community organizations, and partners of Gwynn Oak and Woodlawn