

WABA Trails Testimony

June 10, 2021

Chairperson Cheh and Members of the Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Ursula Sandstrom. In my job, I work for the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, WABA, as the Outreach Manager though I am here in my personal capacity to share my perspective. These last six years, I have managed WABA's trails outreach & support program portfolio, which includes the DC Trail Ranger program, and supporting and training 911 on trails.

The current budget proposal includes some fantastic, necessary trail investments, making low-stress, off-street, multi-use trails in DC safer to get to and be on. Notably funded are the vital connections between the Anacostia River Trail and Marvin Gaye Trail via Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave NE (identified in the budget in "Anacostia Riverwalk Trail- Neighborhood Access"), and the Arboretum Bridge connections. Additionally the funding for the rehabilitation of Suitland Parkway Trail is necessary as this project is long overdue and the current trail is dangerous.

Looking at the overall budget, there is not a clear plan for maintaining all of the current and upcoming trails in a State of Good Repair. The DC Council created the DC Trail Ranger program in 2013 to encourage more residents to use our trails, support trail users, and protect infrastructure investments through timely maintenance. WABA and DDOT Urban Forestry have grown the program into a comprehensive trails maintenance and outreach program, providing the daily service vegetation clearing, trash removal and inspections necessary for navigable corridors.

Since 2013, the District has added 8.5 miles of new trail and a lot more people are using DC's trails, including an 81% increase in Anacostia River Trail use from 2019 to 2020 alone. However, program funding in the DC budget has stayed flat at \$100,000 annually for the DC Trail Ranger program. In 2021, the team runs 5 days a week for about 5 months with one visit a week to Oxon Run, Marvin Gaye, Metropolitan Branch each and two visits to the much longer Anacostia River Trail.

A seasonal maintenance program means that trails and trail users are mostly ignored 7 months of the year despite their year-round use for recreation and transportation and maintenance needs. This creates an annual maintenance backlog to be dealt with come May, and months of missed programming opportunities. We know from DC focus group research that inclusive trail programming, and regular staff presence are required for new trail users to feel safe and welcomed. A properly supported trail network would mean two to four shifts each week to Marvin Gaye, Oxon Run, Anacostia River, Metropolitan Branch, Klingle Valley, Rock Creek, Suitland Parkway, and Malcom X trails year-round, 9 full-time green jobs with living wages, walks, rides, and other events programmed year-round, and language access support for programming, especially in ASL, Spanish and Amharic. This would require funding of \$688,000 with year-over-year increases to match the newly opened trail segments.

I encourage the Council to protect our current and future investments in trails by ensuring that DDOT, and other agencies, are providing ground-level, year-round trail maintenance and outreach.