

Port-a-potties saved at Montgomery County parks

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Rest assured Montgomery County park visitors: You won't have to squat in the woods when nature calls.

Parks Director Mary Bradford, in a letter obtained by *The Washington Examiner*, told County Council President Nancy Floreen that her department will spare more than 80 rental port-a-potties that were planned to be scrapped to save \$155,000.

Parks officials were going to eliminate all portable toilets at county parks. But Montgomery residents overwhelmingly blasted the decision in recent weeks, calling it unsafe, unsanitary and inexcusable for one of the nation's wealthiest communities.

The department now concedes the backlash helped keep the commodes.

"[Residents] weren't happy about it," said parks spokeswoman Kate Stookey. "We couldn't blame them. They felt it was essential to have a place to use the bathroom in the park. We listened."

Portable toilets will remain on park property through at least June 30, the end of the fiscal year.

Montgomery's contract with Don's Johns, the region's largest portable toilet provider, was reduced by \$60,000. Much of that came, Stookey said, through joining with Prince George's to secure lower prices for both counties.

More than 40 Montgomery park employees also accepted early-retirement incentives, which cleared enough cash to keep the toilet bowls flowing.

The toilets being sacrificed became somewhat of a last straw for many county residents, who are being asked to pay \$250 more in taxes this year while government services are being dramatically cut to reduce a \$1 billion budget gap. In turn, private donors forked over more than \$40,000 for the commodes, Stookey said.

The parks department's budget was among the hardest hit this fiscal year, absorbing a nearly 17 percent reduction.

Park officials are waiting for authorization from the County Council to keep the port-a-potties, but that is considered a formality.

Council members say they are relieved residents won't be forced to hurry away from parks in search of relief -- or even worse, "go" on park grounds.

"The parks are for the residents," Floreen said. "It certainly seemed that restrooms weren't the best way to cut costs given the demand for park usage."

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