

College Park planning to remove climbing wall

City officials haven't disclosed why they're taking down structure.

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College Park plans to remove a popular climbing wall that was built three years ago with the help of a professional rock climber who raised more than \$100,000 to create the structure.

Officials won't say why they are taking down the climbing wall at the Tracey Wyatt Recreation Complex. Residents asked City Council to keep it in place during the April 15 meeting.

The first public notice of the plan was posted on Mayor Bianca Motley Broom's website.

The climbing wall has been popular with College Park residents, with more than 15,000 visitors since it opened in 2021, Motley Broom said.

Kai Lightner, a professional rock climber and North Carolina native with family ties in College Park, told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution he raised \$100,000 through his nonprofit, Climbing for Change, to build the wall. He wanted to provide free access to the sport for low income and minority youth.

Lightner said he raised another \$10,000 to allow for changes to the climbing patterns, so climbers remain interested and challenged.

Adidas and the climbing organization 1Climb were among the donors.

"I've come back at least a half-dozen times to check on the wall,



The climbing wall has been popular with College Park residents, with more than 15,000 visitors since it opened in 2021, Mayor Bianca Motley Broom said. COURTESY OF CITY OF COLLEGE PARK GOVERNMENT FACEBOOK

to check on the community," Lightner said. "We've had summer camps. This is a wall that is regularly used throughout the year."

The wall is nearly 23 feet tall and 16.5 feet wide. It extends outward about 16 feet.

Lightner said he was recently contacted by the city's recreation director, Michelle Johnson, who asked about the cost of having the wall removed.

"My first questions were: 'Was there any issue with the wall, has the community lost interest, have there been any safety violations?'"

"And basically the answer was, 'No' to all of these questions and they refused to give me a concrete reason as to why they wanted the

wall removed," Lightner said.

Motley Broom has posted emails on her website in which fellow council members and city staff are discussing immediate removal of the wall.

Councilwoman Tracie Arnold wrote in an April 9 email to City Manager Emmanuel Adediran: "Please inform your staff that the removal of the rock climbing wall is not up for debate or discussion. Please have it removed immediately."

Councilwoman Jamelle McKenzie wrote to the mayor a day later, saying: "This is purely an administrative function that should be handled by the office of the city manager and staff."

Motley Broom has asked the city manager to add the issue to a City Council meeting agenda in May, to allow for public input and a vote.

Resident Mose James, whose 9-year-old son Mose James V first visited the wall during summer camp, started the website collegeparkrocks.com in support of keeping the wall.

Mose James V said during public comment at the last City Council meeting that climbing on the wall has taught him self-confidence and bravery.

"My question is why would you want to tear down this wall and rob other kids like me of learning this new sport," he asked.