

Updated 6/14/2024

As of 6/7/2024 The City Is Planning to **Keep** the Climbing Wall

Thanks to the persistent reporting by **Adrienne Murchison of the "Atlanta Journal-Constitution"**, the persistent social media comments/pictorials by College Park Resident **Mose James IV and others**, and the persistent verbal comments at College Park Council meetings by a variety of citizens (including **Mose and his family**), a majority of Council voted at the 6/7/2024 Council Meeting to reconsider a previous vote and keep the Climbing Wall at the Tracey Wyatt Recreation Complex on Godby Road! Please click on the images below to see Ms. Murchison's latest piece and a great recap of this saga by Delaney Miller published in "Climbing".

COLLEGE PARK

Popular climbing wall will remain in place

Backlash City Council faced had members taking another vote. By Adrienne Murchison

College Park's much-talked-about recreational climbing wall will remain at its current location. Public backlash led City Council to its decision to keep the wall in place at the Tracey Wyatt Recreation Complex, the officials said. The city was planning to take down the popular wall but two weeks ago, Councilman Robert Gay stated that he wanted council to reconsider. During a regular meeting on Friday, Council voted to keep the wall at the Godby Road recreation center. Gay and fellow officials said the issue had become "political" receiving too much media attention. Remaining funds from \$200,000 that was to be used for the expense of dismantling the public rock wall and moving it to another location will now go toward programming and safety initiatives, according to the city. Officials were looking into the wall going to the High C. Conley Recreation Center or the Weyman and Desler Study Recreation Center but the wall is too tall for those locations. Councilwoman Janelle McKenzie said. Gay and McKenzie were the deciding votes of the four councilmembers. Councilwoman Trace Arnold voted in opposition and Councilman Joe Carr abstained. The rock climbing wall has been closed since January for maintenance and is expected to reopen soon for children's summer camp. The wall first opened in 2020 to offer low-income and minority youth free access to rock climbing. Kai Lightner, a professional rock climber, raised more than \$100,000 for its construction through his nonprofit, Climbing for Change.

City officials' disagreement on the rock wall became public in April when Councilman Arnold pushed for the wall to come down. She did not state her reasons until Friday. The wall is located in Arnold's Ward 11 district where residents don't use the wall as much, she said. Mayor Bianca Motley Brown has said the wall has attracted 15,000 visitors since it opened three years ago. For weeks, council has heard from members of the public who are against removing the wall, including Lightner. Lightner said he wants to celebrate the wall staying in place with a community climbing party at the recreation center. Robert Mose James IV, who has frequently visited the rock wall with his wife and children, credits Gay for the city's change of mind on the wall. "I am happy that the council listened to the voice of the community and I've noticed that the community is coming together," James said. "It's unfortunate that we had to go through all of this just to get back to where we started in keeping the wall at its current location."

College Park City Council reversed course on moving the climbing wall and it will remain at the Tracey Wyatt Recreation Complex in College Park. COURTESY OF MOSE JAMES IV



How "Ego, Innuendos, and Lies" Almost Led to the Removal of a Beloved Community Climbing Wall

In 2021, Kai Lightner helped open a free climbing wall outside Atlanta for an underprivileged community. City officials fought to take it down.

Delaney Miller Jun 10, 2024

Kai Lightner does ribbon cutting ceremony in front of new wall

Heading out the door? Read this article on the new Outside+ app available now on iOS devices for members! [Download the app.](#)

When professional climber [Kai Lightner](#) partnered with Kevin Jorgeson's [1Climb](#) to secure a \$100,000 donation from Adidas three years ago to build a climbing wall in College Park, Georgia, he aimed to provide climbing opportunities for underprivileged Black youth.

"As a Black kid coming up in climbing, I felt like the only way I got here was by the grace of God," says Lightner. "I don't

The City Is Planning to **Remove** the Climbing Wall

During public comment at the 4/15/2024 Regular Council meeting, I was surprised to hear **citizens appealing to M&C that they stop the removal of the popular climbing wall at Tracey Wyatt Recreation Complex** on Godby Road. College Park has been in the news a lot lately about unusual actions, either instituted by Council or instituted by staff and upheld by Council. **Please see the article from the Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) below.**

I could think of no reason why Council would want to remove the climbing wall. During my tenure on Council (ending 12/31/2023) I had not heard of any accidents, safety issues, lack of community interest, etc. In fact, **its removal would appear to run counter to the new Council's apparent objective of making recreational opportunities for College Park youth more affordable** (e.g. free recreational services for low income families was recently approved by Council). And **this affordable opportunity is wonderfully unique among Metro Atlanta cities!**

I was on Council when Mayor Motley Broom announced that Mr. Lightner was planning to donate this facility to the City - he raised over \$100,000 to do so (He also was one of the citizens appealing its planned removal at the 4/15/2024 Council meeting, indicating that he had visited the Wyatt Recreation Complex a number of times to check on it - it even has been used in CP Summer Camp programs.). **This project was facilitated by the Mayor.** In emails that she referenced on [her website](#), the Councilperson for that ward (Ward Three) gave no

explanation and another councilperson said it should be left as a staff decision (i.e., something Council shouldn't interfere with). So **if it is removed, what recreational benefit will replace it?** I don't recall all that was on that wall before the climbing wall was put up. It may have been a TV and a "Wall of Fame" honoring those who so generously contributed their time and/or treasure to the Complex. Still, considering the likely spirit behind those donations, **I wonder if at least some of them wouldn't willingly forgo their names being displayed there, in lieu of tearing down the climbing wall...**

College Park planning to remove climbing wall

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

By **Adrienne Murchison**
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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 iClimb 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.