

CITY OF ROCKVILLE YOUTH COMMISSION

Annual Report
2025-2026



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It has been an honor to serve as the chairperson of the City of Rockville's Youth Commission. I am extremely grateful for this Commission, the relationships I have built and the opportunity to help shape the foundation of a Commission that will continue to flourish.

This year, we challenged ourselves not only to identify issues affecting young people, but to actively participate in conversations and initiatives that could create positive change. We worked to ensure that the voices, ideas, and experiences of young people were represented in our community. Through advocacy, community engagement and collaboration, we worked to make sure that youth voices were heard and that our City continued to grow as a more inclusive and accessible community for young people.

This term, we focused on action. We turned rejection from previous terms into redirection, continuing the conversation, advocating for change and creating new opportunities for youth engagement. This speaks to the value of our Commission.

I am extremely proud of the dedication and leadership our Commissioners demonstrated throughout the year. I would like to thank my fellow commissioners, our staff liaisons, the Mayor and Council, schools, community partners and everyone who supported our work and helped create opportunities for young people to be heard.

This year has shown us the importance of young people having a seat at the table and the impact we can make when we use our voices. I look forward to seeing the Youth Commission continue to grow, lead and create meaningful change in the years ahead.

Leila McCarthy
Chairperson
City of Rockville Youth Commission
2025-2026 Term

OVERVIEW

The Rockville Youth Commission promotes leadership and advocacy while working to make Rockville a more welcoming and supportive community for young people. We prioritize inclusivity, communication and representation, striving to ensure that the voices and perspectives of our peers are heard.

By connecting with Rockville's youth and working with City officials, we identify issues that matter to young people and develop goals and plans to address them. This year, we built on ideas from previous terms and turned them into action, creating new opportunities to connect with and engage our community.



2025-2026: A YEAR OF ACTION

Social Media Advocacy

Successfully advocated for an official Youth Commission social media presence after continued efforts over multiple terms.

Youth Town Hall

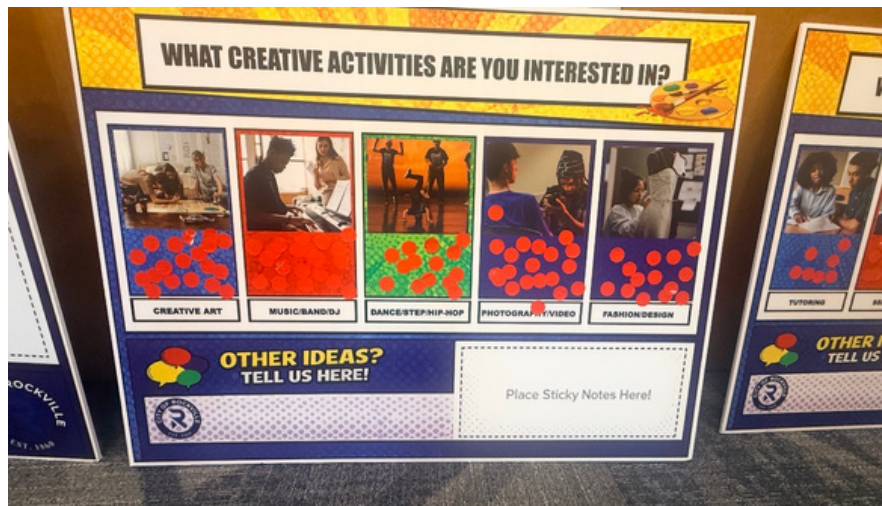
Planned and facilitated a Town Hall at Twinbrook Community Recreation Center, engaging more than 45 youth in grades 5-8.

Youth Voice in City Government

Expanded opportunities for commissioners and youth to contribute perspectives to City initiatives and conversations.

YOUTH OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

- Worked with Student Government Associations to share community engagement opportunities.
- Attended school open houses and other school events to increase awareness of the Youth Commission and promote the Youth Voice in Government survey.
- Visited middle schools to promote the Youth Town Hall.
- Toured Rockville facilities to learn about opportunities available to youth.
- Co-hosted the Teen Summer Kick-off Party at the Swim Center.
- Attended community events, including the opening of a Maryland Health Clinic.



ADVOCACY & YOUTH VOICE

Identified barriers affecting Rockville youth and discussed possible solutions, including a dedicated youth center.

Advised the Recreation & Parks Department on programming for young people.

Served on Community Services grant review panels.

Participated in a focus group for the City's Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plan.

Discussed school safety following the shooting incident that occurred at Wootton High School.

Participated in an informational session about the rewrite of the City's Zoning Code.



WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOUTH

The Youth Commission conducted the Youth Voice in Government Survey to better understand the experiences and concerns of Rockville youth and how they want to engage with local government. Ninety young people responded, helping inform the Commission's priorities and approach to youth engagement.

- **Youth want accessible ways to be heard:** 67% preferred online surveys, 47% social media and 36% school-based discussions as ways to provide input to local government.
- **Youth identified important challenges:** Academic pressure, mental health and bullying/peer pressure were recurring themes in their open-ended responses.
- **Youth want stronger connections to their community:** Responses reflected interest in opportunities to connect, participate and more easily learn about resources and opportunities available to them.
- **Youth voice should be gathered in multiple ways:** The responses reinforce the Commission's approach of combining surveys, school outreach, social media and in-person engagement rather than relying on traditional public meetings alone.



FUTURE INITIATIVES

Using feedback from our survey and Youth Town Hall, we identified four areas to help guide our future work.

Civic Engagement & Advocacy

We will continue advocating for issues important to Rockville youth, including furthering sustainability efforts, a more youth-friendly Town Center and the development of a dedicated youth center. We also want to ensure student voices are heard in issues such as MCPS redistricting and explore life skills and career readiness workshops in partnership with local businesses.

Social Engagement

With the launch of our new Instagram account, we have a new way to share information, promote events and connect directly with Rockville youth. We hope to use this platform to highlight our work, encourage youth involvement and provide another way for our peers to share their voices and ideas.

Health & Well-Being

Mental health, wellness and bullying were among the concerns raised through our Youth Voice in Government Survey. We want to explore programs and initiatives that address these and other issues affecting young people, advocate for greater safety in schools and seek opportunities to partner with organizations that support youth well-being.

Community

We plan to strengthen connections with other City commissions, community groups and schools to bring more youth perspectives into community conversations. We also hope to expand Youth Town Halls to other community centers and explore events that bring young people together, such as a youth street festival and community movie nights.

COMMISSIONERS

Name

Leila McCarthy, Chair
Daniela Naaman, Vice Chair
Ansuya Bisbey
Catherine Bucsa
Desalegn Early
Andrianna Gooneskera
Allan Guech
Paige Henry
Albert Leigh
Elijah Noda
Azusa Strader

Term Expiration

October 1, 2026
October 1, 2026
November 1, 2026
November 1, 2026
November 1, 2026
November 1, 2026
October 1, 2026
October 1, 2026
October 1, 2026
November 1, 2026
October 1, 2026

Youth Commission Staff Liaisons: Jordan Perry & Melinda Norton

Youth Commission Councilmember Liaison: Marissa Valeri