

February 8, 2022

Oral Testimony for Montgomery County's Fiscal Year 2023 Capital Budget and FY23-28

CIP

Good evening,

My name is Vanesa Pinto. I am a proud resident of Long Branch for more than 21 years. As an immigrant with a small family, brought me to look for an extended family that I found in the Long Branch community, so I became a volunteer and a community leader.

Every day I work promoting community leadership and empowering the community through civic actions and collective advocacy, I represent an engaged, hard-working, caring multicultural community who for the last two years have been working collaboratively with Parks, DEP, DOT, CGS in solving community problems hoping that we can be part of the change we want to create in our community.

I support full funding for the **Recreation Department as well as funding for the Department of General Services**. ironically for an underinvested community, the Long Branch Recreation Center, the only communal space we have, has been closed to the community since the beginning of the pandemic and is currently used as a men's homeless shelter. It's critical the refurbishment money for the Rec Department, stays within the budget, and the process is prioritized. DGS will also need funds for a building assessment and to make the necessary repairs to recover our Center.

This unique place represents a place for learning and activities for kids including the after-school program and Summer Camps; a space for youth to practice the sports they like safely; or a place for seniors to access health programs, and community support.

I'm also in support of the **restoration of funding for the Parks Department**. Long Branch has 7 parks that have been neglected for years. Parks are important for obvious reasons, but for my community, a walk by the park can be the only therapeutic moment where a single mom can have relief from her hard life; or the "Disneyland" that a father can afford to take his children on a weekend; or the only daring place where a senior person can evoke those valuable memories from back home.

Restoration of funding for the Parks Department will help ensure that money is available for:

- Replacement of park equipment. Many of the Parks in Long Branch are dated and in need of updates.
- Functional, safe, and accessible trails, will be essential for connectivity in our community especially as the Purple Line project moves forward.
- Maintenance, updates, and upgrades to athletic fields to support outdoor activity and increase mental health and wellness in our community

- Community gardens and public amenities that engage people in Long Branch and encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- Initiatives to support cleaning up the water in Long Branch Creek a space that we use for recreation and learning with our friends from the Audubon Naturalist Society who have worked with the Latino population in our community to build interest and investment in the outdoors and conservation.
- ADA compliance needs to ensure that parks in our community meet the needs of all community members and are accessible for people regardless of age and ability.

Full funding for these departments can support projects that are essential to us, and address some of the historic inequities and underinvestment in Long Branch.