

Members of the County Council

Thank you for accepting this written testimony, as well as my oral testimony to be delivered on February 9th.

While I have reviewed it, I will not pretend to have a fully fledged alternate budget and Capital Improvement Program (CIP), or to have a comprehensive plan to fund my priorities, particularly within financial and other constraints imposed by short term realities. I understand that the creation of a budget is a complex process where there is no pleasing everyone, so before I get into the details I just want to say I appreciate all the effort that went into this document, and know that while my and other voices may help shape it, so will financial realities, and to some degree that is fair.

That said, budgets are also values documents. It's easy for the county executive or council to say something is important, it's another thing altogether to devote the resources necessary to make progress a reality. As someone who devotes a lot of their energy to addressing the region's housing crisis, most of my focus for this testimony will be on what I believe is the need for a major increase in funding for affordable housing. I know that the proposal provides almost \$150 million for affordable housing projects of one kind or another, and that is to be commended, but as you can see by looking around the county, or reading the planning department's housing needs assessment, we need much much more.

I advocate for zoning reform and more market rate housing for a reason, I think they are both needed, and they both help solve our housing crisis (furthermore, we can't provide the affordable housing we need without major zoning reform), but people making significantly less than the area median income, particularly those below 65, 50, or even 30% of it, need more than that. They need assistance, and we need to pay to make it happen, as the MPDU program is only meant to target moderate, not low income households.. I am glad that Thrive 2050, the proposed general plan for the county, calls for significant affordable housing and affirms housing as a human right, but we can only claim to live our values on that issue if we devote more funds to it. I urge the council to do all they can to increase affordable housing funding in this proposal, and raise more funds, yes including taxes, yes including *my* taxes, to help pay for it in the long term. I understand that to some degree the county's hands are tied by the 3.2% percent cap on the local income tax until the state takes action to lift it, but there are alternative sources of revenue, including property taxes, an increase in the recordation tax, a potential tax on turnover projects not previously subject to impact taxes, and others we can turn to. I understand that this discussion may be outside the technical scope of this budget document, but I think it is both related and important enough to raise in this forum

I would also like to call attention to the rather dramatic \$19 million reduction in parks funding. I can't speak to this issue quite as much as I can to housing, but I know how important parks have been for me and others to get through the last two years and we have a long way to go to make them more accessible and impactful for so many. I would urge the council to cast a wary

eye towards a cut of this magnitude at any time, let alone during a time when the need for safe, outdoor spaces for recreation has been shown to be more vital than ever.

None of these decisions are easy, I understand that, and I thank you for the work you do every day to balance the needs of the county. That said, they are important, and particularly when it comes to our housing crisis, people are being hurt, and every day we don't make making things better a priority, we fall a day further behind where we need to be.

Thank you,

Michael English
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