



February 18, 2022

## Written Testimony for Montgomery County's Fiscal Year 2023 Capital Budget and FY23-28 CIP

**Submitted by:** Denisse Guitarra, Maryland Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

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Dear Montgomery County Council,

For 125 years, Audubon Naturalist Society has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. We thank the Council for the opportunity to provide testimony for the Montgomery County Fiscal Year 2023 Capital Budget and FY23-28 CIP. ANS asks the County Council to increase the budget requests for Montgomery Parks, and approve the budgets for climate change, stormwater, affordable housing, and the county's capital grants programs.

Although much of our county's new budget needs are and should be focused on addressing the current public health crisis, we strongly advocate for a sustainable post-covid recovery plan which also addresses the four concurrent public health, social & racial, economic and climate crises. We would also like to highlight that currently the "Conservation of Natural Resources" only gets 2.1% of the total capital budget.<sup>1</sup> This is a small slice of the pie knowing that climate change is already impacting the lives of people and is a threat multiplier across all the other ongoing crises. We ask the Council to consider and carefully review our budget requests as presented in our testimony.

### **PARKS:**

It is critical to continue to fund the Department of Parks. During the ongoing pandemic, our Parks are serving as natural refuges keeping people healthy both physically and mentally. It is more important than ever that the Parks Department has adequate staff and resources to continue protection of these invaluable natural resources and to assure a healthier future for all.

Natural resource stewardship, including protection of our many stream valleys located in local parkland, is always challenging to fund by comparison to more visible, constructed infrastructure. In fact, Parks requires CIP budget increases to protect our precious natural places to replace aging infrastructure and

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<sup>1</sup> FY23 Capital Budget overview. Available at:  
<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Index.aspx>

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park amenities, expand the network of trails, increase community-based park activities like community gardens and meet the MS4 permit. ANS urges the Council to fund the Department of Park's full request of **\$265 M** for FY23.<sup>2</sup> Currently, CE Elrich's proposed Capital budget would cut Park's budget by **\$19.4 M**<sup>3</sup> from that requested by Parks last fall—Council should restore this cut. Furthermore, we support CE Elrich's additional **\$14.5M** for Stream Protection: SVP projects and an additional **\$8.8M** for parks to meet its MS4 requirements<sup>4</sup>.

Even though the ambitious Long Branch Plan initiative projects which seek to improve the degraded stream valley parks along Long Branch stream is not directly impacted by the budget cuts, it could potentially be impacted in the long run as there is always a risk that since funding is cut in one project, another project might be delayed or eliminated. Hence the importance of funding Park's full request of **\$265 M** for FY23.

#### **CLIMATE CHANGE PLANNING PROGRAM:**

ANS asks the County Council to approve and fully fund the Climate Change Planning Program at **\$1.29 billion**.<sup>5</sup> The new investments of \$653M will be a down payment on making our county more resilient and prepared for the impacts of climate change, as well as taking significant steps to reduce our emissions. These funds will help the County continue with the implementation phases of the County Climate Action Plan.<sup>6</sup> For example, \$655M to fund for mass transit is a great idea to continue to reduce the county's GHG emission by moving people out of cars and onto safe bike & pedestrian facilities and high-quality Bus Rapid Transit.<sup>7</sup> We also applauded the \$171 million for stormwater management and waterways protection.

These funds will be critical in creating a more resilient county that can withstand the impacts of even more extreme climate change impacts. We further advocate the need to prioritize, diversify, and genuinely include more people and communities of color into the climate action plan policies, actions, and decision-making processes.

#### **STORMWATER:**

ANS supports Stormwater Partners Network of Montgomery County's testimony on Department of Environmental Protection and other stormwater budgets. Although Montgomery County has been a leader on stormwater for years, the county still needs to do more. The MS4 permit granted by the state sets the bare minimum for stormwater management to clean up our streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake

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<sup>2</sup> Montgomery County Planning Board. November 1, 2021. [CIP Transmittal Letter, FY23-28](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Planning Board briefing memo on the CE CIP](#). January 27, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> FY23 Recommended CE Elrich Budget in Brief. January 18, 2022. Available at:

[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy23/ciprec/FY23\\_REC\\_BudgetinBrief.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy23/ciprec/FY23_REC_BudgetinBrief.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Summary of Key climate Change Investments. FY23 MOCO Capital Budget. Available from:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Chapter.aspx?ID=MEMO>

<sup>6</sup> Montgomery County Climate Action Plan (2020) Available from:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/climate/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> FTY23 Capital Budget. Climate Change – A Greener County Highlights. Available at:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Chapter.aspx?ID=HL>

Bay, and makes almost no progress on flood resilience. DEP has kept the Water Quality Protection Charge relatively stable with only moderate increases for several years, but far more work is needed to return our watersheds to health and protect our communities from the increasing threats from climate change. At a minimum, the CIP budget items for stormwater management should be fully funded. But the Council should work with the Executive now to plan for future WQPC increases that will allow for a greater scope of ambition in restoring our watersheds.

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING:**

ANS supports the request of \$6M to support affordable housing opportunity<sup>8</sup> and \$132M to continue to support affordable housing acquisition and preservation<sup>9</sup> to ensure county residents have access to affordable and attainable housing options. Ensuring affordable housing within the county to those who need it, especially close to transit options and with access to parks and natural areas, will help prevent sprawl and people “driving until they qualify” outside of transit-accessible areas. Affordable, compact, transit-oriented housing options are one of the most important things we can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from sprawl development and car commuting.

**CAPTITAL GRANTS:**

ANS asks the Council to invest and increase the funds for County’s Capital Grants program to help nonprofits, like ANS, continue our important mission work to better serve the county’s residents. ANS’s new wheelchair accessible trail was partially funded by a county’s capital grant. Our Nature Play Space will go a step further to increase access to nature to children of a wider range of disabilities.

On behalf of ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters, we recommend that the County Council supports the increase funds for Parks, stormwater, climate change, affordable housing, and capital grants programs. We believe allocating funds to these programs is important for the wellbeing of county residents, wildlife, our climate, and our waterways.

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra  
MD Conservation Advocate  
Audubon Naturalist Society

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<sup>8</sup> Affordable Housing Opportunity Fund. Available from:  
<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Project.aspx?ID=P762101>

<sup>9</sup> Affordable housing acquisition and preservation. Available from:  
<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Project.aspx?ID=P760100>