

**FY23 Budget Testimony, April 20, 2022, Public Hearing
Kathleen Samiy, Silver Spring**

On April 22 we will honor Earth Day. Here is one way you can honor it too.

We ask that you take ACTION to **FULLY FUND AND REINSTATE THE DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING** within THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.

This Division once existed, but was phased out over the last 12 years, when it should have been strengthened and fortified. Its demise speaks to fundamental failures of the Planning Department to prepare for the future. **We need a DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING whose goal is to preserve and protect our environment, and plan for climate change.**

We need environmental scientists making the planning decisions on where and how to **dramatically reduce climate-related risks to the County's residents**, businesses, as well as the built and natural environments. The new Division of Environmental Planning should have a division Chief and a team of expert environmental staff scientists. **They should be respected as an authority**, and also report regularly TO YOU (Council Members) AND THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE.

Equity and the Natural Environment are the defining issues of our times. Extreme Heat & Weather are the #1 climate challenges we face in our future. The Climate Action Plan is our county strategic plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2027 (in just 5 years) and 100% by 2035. **You have an Action Plan, but you do not currently have a Planning division and team with appropriate authority and expertise to implement the plan.**

Back up this budget with a directive to the Planning Chair. The County Executive, Council, and Citizens need an Environmental Division to meet the urgency of the moment. This is imperative for our environmental future. **You do not need to change the budget. You only need to restructure and redistribute funds** and consolidate existing staff to create a new Division of Environmental Planning. This should be a top priority for FY2023.

The MNCPPC mission is not only to “manage physical growth and plan communities,” **but also to “protect and steward natural resources.”** In that spirit, the Planning Department must have a new DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING, to act as the gatekeeper and **protect and enhance our degrading natural environment.**

2 minutes