



April 19, 2022

Written Testimony for Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget – in support of increases in funding for Climate Change, Racial Equity & Social Justice, Clean water & Stormwater, Recycling, Transit, and Parks.

Submitted by

Denisse Guitarra, Maryland Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

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 FY23 Operating. ANS asks the County Council to approve the budget requests for the following six priority areas:

1. Climate change
2. Racial equity & Social Justice
3. Clean water & Stormwater
4. Recycling
5. Transit
6. Parks

We strongly advocate for a continued and 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 Environment section only gets 2.9%¹ of the total operating budget. This is relatively a small slice of the pie when knowing that climate change has a direct impact on all of us, all our infrastructure, 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.

CLIMATE CHANGE

ANS asks the County Council to approve and fully fund the Climate Change Planning Program at **\$253.1M**.² These funds will help the County continue with the implementation phases of the County Climate Action Plan.³

- We applaud the addition of a new CIP fund dedicated towards funding a Flood Program manager, Flood GIS specialists and undertaking a Flood Management study.
- We further advocate the need to prioritize, diversify, and genuinely include more people and communities of color in the climate action plan policies, actions, and decision-making processes. We are pleased that this year's budget includes \$300,000 to continue the Community Justice Academy and launch the Community Justice Fund. We ask the Council to also coordinate the

¹ FY23 Montgomery County Operating Budget FY23. Available at:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISOPERATING/Common/Index.aspx>

² Climate Change. Montgomery County Operating Budget FY23. Available from:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISOPERATING/Common/Chapter.aspx?ID=CC>

³ Montgomery County Climate Action Plan (2021) Available from:

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

Climate Action Plan efforts with the Planning Department and other county agencies to better coordinate and make the best use of the resources available.⁴

- We support the addition of \$810,00 in additional funding to improve the health of our county's urban forests.⁵

RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

ANS asks the County Council to approve and fully fund the Racial Equity & Social Justice Program (RESJ) at **1.3M**.⁶ This new source of funds is a great start towards aligning and addressing the racial inequities and social injustice disparities seen across the county, and a down payment on what is needed to create healing opportunities across communities, to prioritize transformational relationships between government and communities and create a culture of change, inclusion, acceptance, and empowerment to those who have historically been left out of important decision-making processes. We look forward to seeing RESJ work become embedded into every department over time and funded accordingly.

CLEAN WATER AND STORMWATER

Montgomery County has done great work meeting regulatory requirements for stormwater: but these requirements are not enough to protect our streams and watersheds. While some watersheds' health has been improving, many are still declining. What streams need is getting harder, too: in the summer, climate change drives more explosive storms that overwhelm the kinds of projects installed to date; and in the winter, more and more salt ahead of unpredictable snowstorms leads to toxic salinity conditions in streams.

DEP, its staff, and its contractors have demonstrated that they are capable of doing more than the next draft permit requires. Environmental groups like ours have been strongly pressing the state to require more ambitious stormwater management, especially using green infrastructure throughout our watersheds and out of stream valleys. Council should direct the Department to go above and beyond the minimum permit requirements; and Council should be prepared to fund a greater amount of work if the state requires it, as they should.

- We think the CE's recommended FY23 budget for Watershed Restoration Program to be \$31.8M which adds 3 new positions⁷ is a good start but won't be enough to support all of DEP's programs.
- Although the increase Water Quality Protection of \$1.3M^{8,9} due to the federal Omnibus earmarks will help the RainScapes program, this is not enough or sustainable funds for the long-term success of this wildly popular program. Council needs a long-term plan to find ways to fully fund the RainScapes and the grants program needs to still be more accessible to BIPOC communities.¹⁰
- Council should include and fund a line item to fund the organic lawn and pesticides program as it currently does not have one for FY23. The County's groundbreaking pesticide law needs dedicated attention and staffing to ensure its success in protecting our waterways and public health.¹¹
- In order to fund more stormwater management projects, the Council should consider raising the Water Quality Protection Charge. We also ask that part of the WQPC funds to be used to conduct more public outreach and engagement as part of the County's goal of broadening and diversifying the number of people actively participating in water quality protection projects and initiatives.

⁴ County Executive's April 7, 2022. Climate Budget Briefing. Available at: <https://youtu.be/x2x49zzZCEg>

⁵ County Executive's April 7, 2022. Climate Budget Briefing. Available at: <https://youtu.be/x2x49zzZCEg>

⁶ Racial Equity & Social Justice. Montgomery County Operating Budget FY23. Available from: <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/basisoperating/Common/Department.aspx?ID=25D>

⁷ Montgomery County Operating Budget FY23 - Environmental Protection - Watershed Restoration. Available at: <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISOPERATING/Common/Department.aspx?ID=80D>

⁸ County Executive's April 7, 2022. Climate Budget Briefing. Available at: <https://youtu.be/x2x49zzZCEg>

⁹ County Executive's April 7, 2022. Climate Budget Briefing. Available at: <https://youtu.be/x2x49zzZCEg>

¹⁰ County Executive's April 7, 2022. Climate Budget Briefing. AND DEP Stormwater Partners briefing on March 30, 2022. Available at: <https://youtu.be/x2x49zzZCEg>

¹¹ DEP Stormwater Partners briefing on March 30, 2022.

- We also ask Council to support and ease permit requirements for more trash trap installations around the county, especially around the Anacostia watershed to meet the trash TMDL goals in underserved communities. Plus, these could be paired up with job training funds for youth.

RECYCLING

DEP's Recycling and Resource Management Division¹² helps county residents put in place better recycling practices but needs more resources. In particular, the Waste Reduction and Recycling Section has only one inspector to cover all 145,000 multi-family properties (properties with more than 730 units). The county also has only 14 inspectors for all single-family households. It seems reasonable that Council could allocate more funds and resources to recycling inspections and outreach as the county continues to grow, especially in multi-family properties.

TRANSIT

In Montgomery County, the transportation sector is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. The County must reduce its emissions by investing in transit to move people, instead of cars, around safely and efficiently.

- We ask Council to support the Montgomery County's Better Buses Campaign¹³ asks to keep Ride On bus services fare free until October 2023 when the county's redesign Ride On study will be complete.
- ANS asks that Council continues to support funding for the construction of the Veirs Mill and MD-355 central BRTs to continue to increase public transit accessibility to communities across the county.
- We support the County's commitment to transition to zero-emissions county feet by providing \$1.8M to replace fossil fueled county vehicles with zero emissions vehicles.¹⁴

PARKS

It is critical now more than ever to continue to fund the Department of Parks. During the pandemic and now, our Parks are serving as natural refuges keeping people healthy both physically and mentally. The Parks Department maintains 421 parks across 37,000 acres of parkland, including community gardens and dog parks, museums and historic buildings, hundreds of miles of natural and hard surface trails, and provides programs and services that appeal to every interest and ability, like nature centers, concerts and exercise classes, and natural resources conservation.¹⁵ The Parks Department must have adequate staff and resources to continue protection of these invaluable natural resources and to assure a healthier future for all. ANS asks the County Council to fully fund the Parks Department FY23 Operating Budget.

On behalf of ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters, we recommend that the County Council supports and takes into consideration our FY23 Operating budget recommendations. ANS believes allocating funds these programs it is important for the wellbeing of county residents, wildlife, and our waterways.

Sincerely,
Denisse Guitarra
MD Conservation Advocate
Audubon Naturalist Society

¹² MoCo DEP - Recycling and Resource Management Division Available from:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/sws/>

¹³ MoCo Better Buses Campaign. Keep bus fares free. Available from:

<https://smartergrowth.net/uncategorized/sign-up-to-testify-for-free-fares/>

¹⁴ Climate Change. Montgomery County Operating Budget FY23. DOT section. Available from:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISOPERATING/Common/Chapter.aspx?ID=CC>

¹⁵ Montgomery Parks. Available at: <https://montgomeryparks.org/about/parks/>