

February 6, 2024

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850

FY25 Capital Budget and FY25-30 Capital Improvements Program

Good afternoon. My name is Carrie Kisicki and I am testifying on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the D.C. region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

We are pleased to see a major commitment to affordable housing production and preservation in the proposed budget, and urge you to support these appropriations in full. The Housing Initiative Fund and Non-Profit Preservation Fund are essential tools to sustain the work of affordable housing providers. Providing robust funding to these initiatives must be a priority to ensure that we do not let opportunities to provide affordable housing slip through the cracks. The level of annual funding proposed in this year's CIP appropriately reflects the urgency of our housing shortage and the scale of our housing need, and should represent a benchmark for future years.

We also support the over \$580 million in proposed funding to continue building out our planned BRT network and deliver better bus service for Montgomery County. These investments are necessary to provide great service on major corridors to those who depend on it, and achieve our county's climate goals by making bus service a fast and convenient alternative to driving.

To reduce emissions from vehicle travel, we also need to prioritize making our county a safe place to walk and bike. We are glad to see a strong commitment to Vision Zero in this CIP as well as funding for key pedestrian facility and bikeway projects, and urge you to support these appropriations.

We note that the Parks budget recommended in this CIP is about \$24.2 million short of the Parks Department's FY25-30 request. This cut could threaten the Parks Department's ability to carry out important maintenance responsibilities and accessibility improvements, including Vision Zero safety improvements. We ask you to please support the full Parks budget request.

Finally, we would like to highlight the importance of the Agricultural Land Preservation Easements program and ask that the Council support the recommended appropriation for this program. The Agricultural Reserve is a unique and valuable resource, and as our county continues to grow and welcome new residents, our strategy—as outlined in the Thrive general

plan—of focusing new housing and amenities in transit-oriented communities must go hand in hand with concrete investments in protecting the Ag Reserve for the long term.

Please see our detailed testimony below.

Affordable housing:

- We ask for your support for the \$82 million appropriated for the Housing Initiative Fund, and \$35 million appropriated for the Non-Profit Preservation Fund. Affordable housing developers are ready to do their part to meet our county's housing needs, and these funds provide needed support to make these projects feasible at the scale our housing shortage demands. As we continue to welcome new residents and invest in our county's economic development, transportation infrastructure like the Purple Line, and other exciting amenities, it is important that we prioritize affordable housing production and preservation to ensure that all people can take part in our communities and enjoy these benefits.

Transportation

- **Bus Priority Program — Minor Projects:** The projects funded by this program include bus lanes, queue jumps and signal priority, and bus stop improvements. These projects are intended to provide near-term, targeted service improvements as the BRT network develops, so riders do not have to wait for the completion of BRT projects to see better service.

This program is absolutely essential given that only one planned BRT line, FLASH on US-29, has begun operation (without dedicated lanes) since the 81-mile BRT network was approved in 2013. The earliest estimate for the completion of a second line, Veirs Mill Road, is FY27; the central portion of the MD 355 BRT line is not expected to be completed until FY29, and the construction timeline for the South/North portions of MD355 BRT is still uncertain. Riders simply cannot wait that long to see service improvements.

We urge you to support the full appropriation for the Bus Priority Program – Minor Projects. Going forward, we ask that the county continue to prioritize fast, reliable, and convenient bus service, and identify the most impactful and cost-effective ways to deliver better bus service to riders.

- **BRT:** We are glad to see funding in this budget to move forward with the next phases of BRT on Veirs Mill Road, MD 355, and US-29, and ask you to support these appropriations.
- **Metro access:** Improved ped/bike access to Metro stations will allow us to make even better use of this important transportation resource, and support transit-oriented development. We are glad to see funding for the North Bethesda Metro Station Northern Entrance and funding (albeit delayed) for the Forest Glen Passageway.

- **Silver Spring and Bethesda Secure Bike Facilities:** We are excited to see that the county has secured federal funding for secure bike facilities at Silver Spring and Bethesda Metro stations and look forward to seeing this project move forward.
- **Pedestrian and bike facilities:** We ask for your support on the timely construction of key pedestrian and bikeway projects. Timely completion of these projects is essential to achieving Vision Zero; providing safe, accessible, and convenient transportation options to people of all ages, incomes, and abilities; and encouraging people to adopt more sustainable modes of transportation.

The budget items in this category for which we are asking your support include:

- Bethesda Bikeway and Pedestrian Facilities
- Bicycle-Pedestrian Priority Area Improvements
- Bicycle-Pedestrian Priority Area Improvements - Purple Line
- Bicycle-Pedestrian Priority Area Improvements - Wheaton CBD
- Bikeway Program Minor Projects
- Bowie Mill Road Bikeway
- Capital Crescent Trail
- Dale Drive Shared Use Path and Safety Improvements
- Falls Road Bikeway and Pedestrian Facility
- Fenton Street Cycletrack
- Good Hope Road Shared Use Path
- Oak Drive/MD 27 Sidewalk
- Tuckerman Lane Sidewalk
- US 29 Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements

Finally, we are happy to see that the Goshen Road South project no longer recommends roadway expansion, and instead focuses on a no-build alternative with spot roadway, pedestrian, and bicycle improvements.

- **Vision Zero:** We are glad to see increased funding commitments for Vision Zero-related items in the CIP, and ask you to support recommended appropriations for Vision Zero improvements, including—
 - the Pedestrian Safety Program
 - Neighborhood Traffic Calming
 - Vision Zero—

in addition to supporting the ped/bike projects mentioned above.

Parks

- Montgomery County's parks make our county an attractive place to live and provide space for recreation, community gathering, and enjoying nature for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities. It is important to keep them in good repair and to continue making accessibility, safety, and climate resilience improvements. We ask you to fully fund the Parks budget request so they can continue this important work.

Conservation

- We ask for your continued support of the Agricultural Land Preservation Easements program, which provides funds for the purchase of agricultural and conservation easements.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carrie Kisicki". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carrie Kisicki
Montgomery County Advocacy Manager