



CLIMATE COALITION Montgomery County, MD

To: Council President Friedson and Council Members
From: Climate Coalition Montgomery County
Date: April 8, 2024
RE: FY25 Budget Request

Dear Council President Friedson and Council Members

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the FY25 operating budget. The 20 member organizations of the Climate Coalition Montgomery County strongly support, with amendments, the County Executive's budget proposals that address the climate emergency, including the increased allocation to the Green Bank, ongoing base programs, and the proposed increases above base budget, articulated below. But first, we would like to draw your attention to areas that we ask Council to address that fall short in the Executive's budget.

A. Increase allocations to achieve meaningful outcomes in these areas:

1. Additional \$300K for a broad scale, public outreach program.

- The largest disappointment in the County Executive's budget is that, of the \$230K of new allocation for the NDA, **only \$130K is being earmarked for public engagement.** The County cannot reach its climate goals unless the public becomes more involved in the County, State, and Federal programs to reduce carbon pollution and increase resilience.

2. Additional \$100K for DEP to expand the Weed Warrior program to control invasive vines that are choking trees and forests.

- One of the gravest impacts to our forests is uncontrollable English Ivy, porcelain berry, kudzu and other invasive vines. One of the most cost-effective ways to preserve tree canopy is removal of invasive vines. In addition, this is an excellent mechanism to get county residents directly involved in climate and environmental activities.

B. Ensure progress for street tree planting. We support the requested \$500K in DOT's proposed budget to enhance stump and tree removals to address the backlog that prevents planting of street trees.

- a. However, we wish to know how much this will reduce the backlogs of 15-18 months for removal of dead or unhealthy trees, and more than 6 years for stump removal, and we request that DOT set an annual goal of optimal service delivery for these efforts.**

C. Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission. In examining the MNCPPC budget, we see an addition of 20 FTE with no details. The Climate Coalition is advocating for two particular positions which we hope the Council will specifically articulate:

- 1. A Forest Conservation Planner** in the Parks and Planning Department. Last year, the County Council unanimously voted to amend the Forest Conservation Law and regulations, Bill 25-

22. This position is necessary to ensure the new laws and regulations are implemented and enforced.

2. **A Climate Policy Planner:** Land use has a significant effect on climate change. **The Planning Department is in great need for a specialist to supplement their ability** to ensure that the various planning processes effectively incorporate actions to reach the goals of both the Climate Action Plan and of Thrive; incorporating advice on climate-friendly best practices in development reviews; improving Climate Assessments of master plans and ZTAs; and more.

D. Montgomery County Public Schools. MCPS remains one of the most significant areas that need to speed up adoption of climate solutions. The Inflation Reduction Act¹ (IRA) and the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 (CSNA)² provide financial incentives that can be applied to MCPS, increasing the value of the funding they receive from the County. Not using these incentives leaves money on the table resulting in the unnecessary waste of county funds. **Continued approval of MCPS budget should be contingent on the use of the incentives and demonstration of progress including:**³

1. Elective pay option for solar and energy efficiency.
2. Incentives for building net-zero schools. Counties that build net-zero schools would receive an additional 5% increase in the state contribution to the project.
3. Incentives for utilities to create electric school bus pilot programs providing at least 25 electric school buses financed with total rebates of up to \$50 million per utility.

We also request that the County remove funding for synthetic turf sports fields at all new and modernized MCPS schools. State-of-the-art grass sports fields have all-weather playability and save approximately \$600-800K per field over synthetic carpeted fields.

E. County Council. Fund the Office of Peoples' Counsel (OPC).

The Climate Coalition MoCo urges Council to allocate \$261,580 and 2 FTE to the OPC. Land use is a complex topic even for the most stout of heart. Having a functioning OPC serves the public interest by enabling transparent and meaningful public understanding and participation in difficult decisions, especially those we must make to address climate change. We strongly urge you to support this request.

In addition to the above areas requiring your particular attention, the Climate Coalition Montgomery County fully supports the Executive's proposals to increase base funding as follows:

For DEP:

- \$5.7M CIP for flood management

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/cleanenergy/inflation-reduction-act-guidebook/>

² https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/chapters_noln/Ch_38_sb0528E.pdf

³ Factsheet highlighting net zero schools from Baltimore City and Howard County. In each case, the net zero school construction cost came in below the [average school construction cost](#) including site preparation. [Wilde Lake Middle School](#) – Howard County (completed 2017), \$329 per sq ft with site preparation & solar panels vs 2016 average cost of \$335 per sq ft. [Graceland Park / O'Donnell Heights Elementary/Middle](#) – Baltimore City (completed 2020), \$358 per sq ft with site preparation & solar panels vs 2019 average cost of \$378 per sq ft. [Holabird Academy](#) – Baltimore City (completed 2020), \$364 per sq ft with site preparation & solar panels vs 2019 average cost of \$378 per sq ft.

- \$1.1M for implementation of the electric leaf blower bill (FY24 supplement plus FY25 new)
- \$200K to expand the successful Energy Ambassadors program for outreach to help low-income communities access IRA resources
- \$200K for technical support to expand EV community charging
- \$345K to expand solar energy programs and hire a Solar Technical Program manager
- \$275K for BEPS energy audits for under-resourced buildings

For DGS:

- Funds to retrofit certain County facilities to be Energy Resilience Hubs
- \$4.1M to expand purchase of County EV fleet and buses

The Climate Coalition also supports several items that may not be included in the Climate Change Multi-Agency Budget Crosscut but are found in Agency budgets, as follows:

DEP:

- \$100K for Bag Tax enforcement which will bring in hundreds of thousands more funds for the Water Quality program
- Increased funding plus an FTE for Tree Montgomery and MS4 Inspections
- \$3M plus an FTE for investment in Zero Waste programs
- Increasing the Water Quality Protection Charge by \$10.50, *with the caveat that this regressive tax be corrected in subsequent legislation by removing the cap on the 7th tier*

DHHS

- \$1M and 8 FTE to fully operationalize the new Rent Stabilization Program in FY25

DOT

- \$3.5M and 27 FTE to increase up-county access to transit by funding the Great Seneca Transit Network

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Karen Metchis on behalf of the Climate Coalition Montgomery County

Climate Coalition MoCo Member Organizations

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| ● 350 Montgomery County | ● Montgomery Countryside Alliance |
| ● ACQ Climate (Ask the Climate Question) | ● Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions |
| ● Bethesda Green | ● One Montgomery Green |
| ● Biodiversity for a Livable Climate | ● Poolesville Green |
| ● Chesapeake Climate Action Network | ● Safe Healthy Playing Fields |
| ● Ecosystems Study Group | ● Sugarloaf Citizens' Association |
| ● Elders Climate Action | ● Transit Alternatives to Mid-County Highway Extended/M-83 (TAME) |
| ● Environmental Justice Ministry Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church | ● The Climate Mobilization Montgomery County |
| ● Friends of Sligo Creek | ● Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee (TPMEC) |
| ● Glen Echo Heights Mobilization | ● Zero Waste Montgomery County |
| ● Green Sanctuary Committee of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Silver Spring | |