

“Tree Friends United” Testimony on FY25 County Operating Budgets

April 9, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I represent Tree Friends United. We are a group of more than 150 citizens who are greatly concerned about the accelerating spread of invasive vines and other species that are destroying our county's trees and our parks' ecosystems.

In our Bethesda area along the Potomac River, many old trees bordering MacArthur Boulevard, River Road, the Cabin John and Clara Barton Parkways, and other roads have been killed by massive infestations of English ivy and kudzu. Elsewhere, mature trees are being damaged by huge curtains of porcelain berry and other vines. Numerous invasive species have spread through portions of our parks to destroy the native diversity and habitats.

Thousands of county property owners don't realize that English ivy and other vines climbing their trees will eventually kill them with a smothering grip.

Our all-volunteer group is out in the trenches cutting these vines and other invasives to help save our trees and forests. We work with Montgomery Parks, the county DOT, and the National Park Service in a three-mile corridor along MacArthur Boulevard that includes historic Glen Echo Park and the C&O Canal.

As an advocacy group, Tree Friends United represents the shared concerns of many citizens and environmental groups. **We urge the County Council to increase, not decrease, funding to save our trees and native ecosystems.** Without decisive action, the problems will grow. Remediation will become ever more difficult and costly.

You can help avert a crisis by responding to our three funding requests:

1. **Provide DOT's requested increase of \$500,000 in its Tree Removal and Planting program** to include removal of invasive vines from trees bordering our roads.
2. **Give Montgomery Parks additional funding** to save the 415 parks they manage.
3. **Fund a public outreach campaign** to raise public awareness and participation to save our trees and parklands. This would be similar to the county's raising awareness about recycling and the state's campaign about invasive fish species like snakeheads.

By supporting these three funding requests, the Council can help restore our county's ecosystems for us and our children. It is a cause that all citizens can rally around.

Thank you for your time and attention.