

Burning the county's trash at the Dickerson incinerator is a practice that harms human health and the environment which everyone on the council is 100% aware of.

The incinerator is leaking critical levels of dioxin into our airshed.

As all of you are aware Council president Natali Fani-Gonzalez announced that more information and deliberation was needed before a decision to close the incinerator could be made. This delay would put off any action until 2027 or later which means she is willing to put the health of the constituents at risk as well as harm the environment even further that society has as well as the council has.

In contrast, County Executive Marc Elrich and the county's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have provided studies, analyses, data, and a detailed budget to justify closing the aging and polluting trash incinerator.

Elrich and his budget instead propose that our county's non-recyclable trash be transported to well-vetted, safe, and environmentally-sound landfills in neighboring states.

Truck hauling of trash to the nation's roughly 3,000 landfills is by far the most common waste management system in the U.S. It accounts for the disposal of 65% of trash after recyclable and compostable material is diverted from the "waste stream." The technology has vastly improved over the past decade.

Meanwhile, hundreds of incinerators have been shuttered nationwide over the last three decades. Most were shut down after about 25 years. Montgomery County's facility has been operating for 30 years in Dickerson. It is the largest single source of pollution—including climate-altering greenhouse gases—in the county. Yet, all of you taut how you are trying to do better with the environment. I would say this along with many of your other actions would say otherwise.

In September 2025 DEP took a giant step toward overhauling the county's trash management system. The County released an RFP (request for proposal) to private companies to propose the means and methods—and cost—of disposing of our non-recyclable trash.

Bids arrived in November and were evaluated in an established process that protects propriety information. DEP compared costs and other factors connected with the current (trash burning) system and announced early this year their judgment that the incinerator should be decommissioned and a transition to landfill should occur.

Much of that comparative analysis was shared with most of the County Council members in one-on-one briefings. But, some of the specifics of the proposals could not be divulged prior to acceptance of the overall plan and budget by the Council due to county procurement practices.

Notably, Council President Fani-Gonzalez declined a DEP briefing. Instead, she sent a letter to County Executive Elrich on January 23, 2026, saying that the Council "needs a

comprehensive, objective, and thorough analysis of all waste disposal options before we should consider any fundamental changes to the system.” Again, putting the health of the people of Montgomery County at risk even further than they have been. As she stated in her interview with the Washingtonian in March, “I feel I am in a position of power, and you’ve got to use that power”. Well..use that power she has been as far as the environment goes and not in a positive way whether it is the incinerator or shooting down a data center task force, to being a part of a council that along with PG county is responsible for 46% or the tree loss in the state of Maryland accounting to the most recent study.

In a reply letter from Elrich to Fani-González in early March, Elrich said that delays in closing the incinerator would force the county to incur considerable additional costs to support the facility.

In an article in March in The Montgomery Banner Mary Anderson, a spokesperson for Elrich, said that the incinerator would need \$17 million in repairs in the short term. Reworld, the company that operates the facility, estimated last year that it could cost \$50 to \$100 million to keep the facility operating safely and efficiently for another seven years.

The County must give Reworld six-month’ notice that its services are no longer needed. The cost of decommissioning the facility is around \$3 million. Under Elrich’s plan that notice would be delivered in July.

At this juncture, both county leaders are at a disappointing and irresponsible impasse in light of recent concerning leaks at the incinerator.

An annual emissions test in September revealed that the incinerator had been emitting nearly double the permitted limit—and 21 times more than in tests a year ago—of the deadliest chemicals known to science, dioxin and furans. In December, a second breakdown occurred, releasing 50 times the already toxic emissions. There’s no safe emissions limit established for these chemicals. Repairs have been completed and an investigation is underway. But the implications of these serious failures cannot be overstated. The facility is simply too old and the risk of continued operation is too great. (See links to our press releases on this issue.)

Notably, County Executive Elrich and Council President Fani-Gonzalez do not disagree about everything concerning the county’s waste management future. Both support technology called “advanced waste processing,” or AWP. AWP enhances the extraction of recyclable and organic material from the waste stream—before it goes to landfill or burning. The technology can reduce the volume of leftover trash by as much as 40%, and nearly eliminate the organic material going to landfill—which can generate methane gas.

But here’s the rub. Fani-Gonzalez has evinced interest in putting this technology in place before the incinerator is closed while Elrich and DEP (the experts) say AWP is complex and cannot be put in place quickly. DEP is in the process of writing an RFP to choose an AWP vendor to build and operate such a facility at the Shady Grove Transfer Station (where most of the County’s trash goes first for sorting).

At a minimum it would take two years to create the AWP facility.

In addition, both leaders agree on the benefits of removing bulk food waste from the waste stream through a program that would collect it from commercial and residential properties. The material would be composted. That program, too, would take time to put in place, and many years to reach its full potential. Food scraps comprise 17% to 20% of the current volume of waste. The county in 2025 budgeted \$28 million to initiate and plan this program. Three residential food scrap collection pilots are already underway. The aim is to have an expanded program substantially up and running in 2029.

Two other pieces of the waste puzzle are also widely supported: (a) recycling so-called “C&D” (construction and demolition) materials in lieu of burning or burying them, and (b) “Save-As-You-Throw”—a payment plan that would allow residents to recycle as much as they want and pay a variable amount based on the volume of trash they generate, much the way we now pay for our electricity usage. DEP is currently conducting a pilot for this program as well.

There are alternatives to incineration , food scrap composting, C&D recycling and save-as-you-throw and so forth.

The County Executive’s FY2027 budget (for July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027) includes a transition to landfilling and closing the incinerator by the end of 2026 / beginning of 2027.

That will dramatically reduce the harmful emissions that are being put in our air and the risk of greater contamination due to future breakdowns at the facility. It will also end the shameful 30-year practice of dumping the toxic ash the incinerator produces (after burning) on a minority community in Virginia.

Any further delay in transitioning away from burning our garbage is not in the best interests of County residents.

I reject the argument that such delay is now necessary—for the reasons stated above and one other: inertia. It’s all too easy for the Council to put the decision off for yet another year, again further harming the people and the environment.

DEP and the Elrich administration have provided the Council with enough information to accept the plan, pass the budget, and get this transition underway.

An independent analysis has found that the overall cost of waste management in this budget cycle (FY2027) will rise modestly no matter which path is chosen. But that cost will be roughly the same with both paths. The difference is that the transition to landfilling and a “zero waste” strategy will build towards the future while sticking with the incinerator will require pouring millions of dollars into it with increasingly uncertain outcomes as the facility continues to age and present risks.

- Landfills today are better regulated and operated than even five years ago. SCA vetted 42 in the region with strict environmental justice (EJ) criteria and found many that have minimal impact on both the nearby population and the surrounding environment. The DEP has chosen landfills that meet these criteria. Toxic emissions from our incinerator that can harm human health are 2.5 to 5 times worse than the vetted landfills.
- Almost all modern landfills capture methane gas. Even with food scraps going to landfill, the greenhouse gas emissions would be around 40% lower than burning trash in Dickerson.
- Switching to zero waste strategies and landfill provide direct incentives to lower trash volume where burning does not. No matter the volume, the County pays Reworld the same amount to burn.
- Conversely, if we landfill our trash, we will only pay for the amount we send. As diversion and recycling increases, our costs will drop.
- Montgomery County currently trucks 150,000 tons of toxic incinerator ash every year to a predominantly Black community in Virginia. Sending our unburned trash to a vetted landfill that meets environmental justice criteria relieves an unhealthy burden to this community.

The bottom line is this: The volume of trash going annually to landfill from Montgomery County could be reduced (over time) to an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 tons a year (from 550,000 tons a year currently) with far less environmental and health impact, no more toxic chemicals being released into the air and no more risk of massive emissions exceedances.

Council President Fani-Gonzalez stated in March 2026, I want to make sure people can feel that they can not just live in this county but they can live in the county with quality of life". If that is really the truth, stop endangering the health and the environment of the residents who live here.

On top of the fact that the council wants to add data centers which will deplete our already depleted rivers & streams (part of that due to their excessive building, destroying small streams, waterways, ground water, and tree cover despite knowing the facts of the impact, as well as Data centers add biocides, corrosion inhibitors, and heavy metals into the environment as well as fine salt...all bad for the environment, now you will be putting the people more at risk yet again with the incinerator by choosing to delay closing it. Do better, look out for the people, natural environment, etc...perhaps focus on cleaning up the dirty natural environment that has taken a hit from all of your approved building. Clean up the local streams filled with trash that are half empty. Stop putting lives at risk all in the name of money. Stop being the Montgomery County version of the "God Squad". You are harming people. No amount of money is worth the lives and health of the people, and the flora and fauna.