

Testimony about County Executive's Proposed 2027 Budget

Robert Pestronk, April 9, 2026

Chevy Chase MD, 20815

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

I have 3 requests: 1) fully fund the County Parks' operating budget at the 6.3% increase requested by Parks rather than at the 4.0% increase proposed by the County Executive; 2) fully fund the County Health Department's budget at the amount proposed by the County Executive; 3) fully fund the Department of Environmental Protection.

Operating budgets for these three departments at these levels in total would comprise but a small fraction of any County budget adopted.

I'll focus on my request for County Parks.

My understanding is that their request won't support any new programs. Instead, it is based on lowering the required lapse rate for positions already approved by the Council but unfilled.

These additional positions would support trail and other park maintenance, police staff for the parks, and professional trades staff with rare, but essential skills needed to keep park property safe, presentable and operational.

The Parks' budget is not an abstraction to me. I regularly use five County Parks, especially those in the Southwest corner of the County where I live. I notice when lawns aren't mowed, when garbage rots in containers, when equipment is broken or dangerous, or poorly maintained. I also observe the slow degradation and erosion of park infrastructure as a result of staff's inability to maintain ground properly.

Preventing these and other problems should be a high priority for all Council members. This work does not come free.

The Friendship Heights sector is the most densely populated portion of Montgomery County. Based upon preliminary ideas from the County Planning Department for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan now under revision, parks will be used more heavily as the Sector becomes more densely populated. This will threaten, place further demands on, erode, eliminate and degrade Park space further. Yet these spaces are essential, detoxifying, and stress-reducing. They are life-giving, life-supporting and life-affirming features for health and well-being.

As an older resident of the County, I take special interest in parts of the County budget which effect me directly. As a former County official in another state and a former elected official in this one I recognize the challenging competition and difficult trade-offs inherent in budget decisions.

Nonetheless, I state my request as I opened my comments. Please fully fund the operating budgets of County Parks, the County Health Department, and the Department of Environmental Protection. Each enables and protects quality of life for all County residents.