

FY27 OPERATING BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

FOSC’S RECOMMENDATION: THE COUNTY NEEDS TO FOCUS MORE BUDGETARY RESOURCES ON PROGRAMS TO INCREASE CLIMATE RESILIENCE (NOT ONLY AT DEP)

My name is Ellen Maidman Tanner. As the new President of the Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC), I am testifying about the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) FY27 budget proposals on behalf of FOSC, a nonprofit founded in 2001. We have 1,400 members, many of whom volunteer on a regular basis to help clean the Creek, monitor water quality, and advocate for measures to support the watershed’s natural health and the enjoyment and safety of visitors.

FOSC is a longtime partner of DEP. We work closely with DEP in many areas and rely on their expertise to protect and improve Sligo Creek and its environs. We often do pilot projects with DEP as they develop and refine their programs. They help us educate our members and others in the Sligo Creek Watershed about how to be more environmentally resilient. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of residents enjoy and learn from our partnership. We also work with the DEP to reduce Sligo's contributions to downstream pollution. What happens in Sligo usually shows up in the Anacostia and the Chesapeake Bay. (Our partnership details are below.)

THE COUNTY NEEDS MORE BUDGETARY RESOURCES FOR PROGRAMS TO INCREASE CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Like DEP, FOSC strongly believes in the need for programs that enhance climate resiliency, and to enhance them in a fair and equitable way throughout the County (and of course elsewhere).

We know that these green goals are also shared by the Council and the County Executive.

Moreover, given the increasing average temperatures and greater intensity in storm events (including precipitation), it is most certainly fair to say that the programs in place will only be needed more and should be enhanced going forward.

Knowing the climate challenges we are already facing will only get worse, it is all the more difficult to understand why a 7% cut in DEP's operating budget is proposed. With a 7% cut, DEP's budget would be the same in nominal terms (ie, non-inflation adjusted) as FY25. This would mean a cut in inflation-adjusted terms, at the same time the environmental outlook is getting worse.

Looking at details, it appears that stream restoration funding would be cut, while climate resilience activities (in the "Energy, Climate, and Compliance Division") would be flat, before accounting for inflation.

We strongly urge the Council to, at a minimum, keep the DEP budget at FY25 levels, not to cut it by 7% over last year's approved budget.

Furthermore, in our view, climate resilience activities should be increased rather than diminished in order to prepare the County for the environmental challenges that are coming toward us at an increasingly rapid pace. Among the critical functions DEP performs in this respect are enforcement of laws and regulations related to water and air pollution, illegal dumping, noise control, and other environmental laws. DEP develops policies and programs focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing the County's climate resilience.

As most municipalities are recognizing, maintaining the health of an urban stream and its watershed is complex, requiring many adjustments, carefully designed to specific need and place. The concrete stormwater channels and the sewage pipes installed when building occurred many years ago, we now know are not satisfactory to today's population or climate change needs. Green building to address climate issues is falling woefully short. It will take multi-year, well-considered large projects to diminish the damage we are witnessing. More funding for these will be required, not less. Furthermore, this is not just a DEP matter. Budget resources for Parks,

MCDOT, and other departments will need to be increased to ensure Montgomery County is prepared to tackle these great environmental challenges.

Thank you for your consideration.

Annex

Details on DEP-FOSC Areas of Cooperation

To name a few of our specific areas of cooperation and key programs that have improved the Sligo Creek watershed and other watersheds:

The Water WatchDog Program, which gives anyone the ability to report Sligo Creek pollution in real-time with photos to the Environmental Health team at DEP, so they can investigate if possible. Through this program, the FOSC community has become the “eyes on the ground” to help DEP stop pollution. Our partnership has stopped many pollution events over the years and has educated many people about what it takes to improve water quality. The partnership was awarded the Montgomery County Civic Federation’s Wayne A. Goldstein Award.

- ***The RainScapes Program***, which has recently developed a pilot program to educate, encourage and enhance residential green infrastructure programs as an important way to tackle stormwater challenges throughout the County. FOSC and a local civic association (SOECA, or Seven Oaks-Evanswood) have held community events under this “Green Ambassador” pilot program, which will help shape further outreach throughout the County.

- ***The New Leaf Blower Law***, which requires people to switch from gas-powered to electric leaf blowers, to reduce community noise levels, improve local air quality and improve health outcomes for workers and others operating leaf blowers. FOSC leaders worked closely with DEP to develop this program and then encouraged the Council to pass the legislation. And while outreach is critical to the creation of any legislation, outreach to support rapid and full implementation is critical to obtaining the

benefits for which the law was designed. **It is therefore rather disturbing to see the significant cut that has been made to this next phase of implementation.**

- ***Tree Montgomery***, which has successfully planted a large number of trees throughout the County to improve water and air quality and, in general, the quality of life for Montgomery County residents. Our community has welcomed this program.

- ***Flood Resilience***. DEP has worked with FOSC (and others) in the roll out of its new flood resilience model and program. Sligo Creek is the pilot location for the modelling work. We commend DEP's flood resilience work.

- ***Stream Restoration Projects***. Whenever possible, our teams work closely with the County to ensure the success of new installations designed to minimize flood risk and support the environmental health of the watershed. An excellent example of this is the recent creation of new stormwater ponds, with extensive native plantings, to help retain water in the Indian Springs Park area. We helped, and will continue to help through trash collection and the removal of invasive plants.

- ***Salt Management***. FOSC is working closely with DEP to improve salt management around the watershed, from salt application to excessive salt removal. Sligo Creek has been hard hit by excessive salt application. Our testing team has measured toxic levels of chloride throughout our Creek nearly every time there is a winter storm event over the past few years. Acute and chronic salt toxicity may be an existential threat to the quality of Sligo Creek. DEP is well aware of this challenge.