



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ROGER BERLINER  
COUNCILMEMBER  
DISTRICT 1

CHAIRMAN  
TRANSPORTATION, INFRASTRUCTURE  
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

May 19, 2016

**Councilmember Berliner Believes ‘Education First’ Budget Vital to County’s Future**

*Council’s decision supports and advances our school’s record of excellence*

The budget we are approving today is fundamentally driven by our commitment to our school system. It is truly an **education first** budget. And that commitment required us to take extraordinary measures: increase property taxes over the charter limit; exceed Maintenance of Effort for our school system by almost \$90 million; and significantly increase recordation taxes. All of this was necessary because of our Council’s unified view that our school system requires a substantial additional investment now if it is to maintain its well-earned reputation for excellence. A reputation that is foundational for our county’s future.

But for the first time in my ten years on the Council, the nature of that investment was radically altered from what had been originally proposed. In a world of finite dollars, we could not fully fund negotiated contracts and at the same time provide funding desperately needed for the classroom. Choices needed to be made and our investment in our school system was altered to reflect the broader priorities of our community – to reduce class size, hire more counselors and classroom aides, and ramp up efforts to reduce the achievement gap. That shift could not have happened without close collaboration, consultation, and compromise between the Council and the Board of Education. And it could not have happened without our Council making it clear that if we are going to exceed MOE by such a huge amount, we must have a new compact with our school partners. This budget marks such a moment. The cooperation that is the hallmark of this budget should be the blueprint for the future.

This budget, unlike the County Executive’s, provides 100% of the school system’s funding request for capital improvements for the next six years. We hear the countless stories of children throughout our county crammed in buildings too small for them. And we hear concerns about school capacity every time we look at a new master plan. We addressed those concerns by providing funding for the construction of over 12,000 new seats in schools across the county. Maintaining our existing infrastructure is also critically important so we provided substantial increases for new roofs, HVAC systems and the like. In all, the Council increased school construction funding by \$160 million more than the Executive’s budget would have provided.

We did not take these steps lightly. Asking our residents to pay more in taxes is never the first option. In fact, it is the option of last resort. *The bottom line is that we could not meet the legitimate needs of our school system without increasing taxes.* But at the same time, we rejected county employee contracts that were simply not sustainable. The contracts submitted to us by the County Executive called for wage increases in the range of 8 percent for most employees. In a time of almost zero inflation we said that was too much, and cut them back by almost half, still

leaving a fair and appropriate bump in compensation for our hard-working county employees – approximately 4.5%.

And while this is an **education first** budget, *it is not an education only budget*. We addressed critical priorities, ranging from basic core government responsibilities such as maintaining our streets in good repair, funding additional police officers and fire and rescue personnel, to helping those in need with expanded health care. We fulfilled our pledge to provide those who serve our disabled community with 125% of minimum wage; we added staff to address pressing environmental issues; we provided funding to end homelessness for our veterans; we increased transportation options for our seniors; fully funded our minority health initiatives; and provided more financial support for our non-profit partners and the arts community.

I am particularly pleased that our budget includes a number of initiatives that I championed, including all-day bus service for the Tobytown community, expanded food distribution programs to combat hunger among low-income school kids and seniors, free bus service on Saturdays for seniors, and more funds to remove stumps and care for our trees.

As your elected representatives, our first responsibility to you, our residents, is to take care of what is vital to the prosperity of our county. I believe we have met that obligation with this budget, and we will be a stronger county, a better county, as a result.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.