MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

VALERIE ERVIN
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 5

Memorandum

April 11, 2013

To: Nancy Navarro, President, County Council
George Leventhal, Chair, Health & Human Services Committee

From: Valerie Ervin, Councilmember – District 5

Re: Council FY14 Funding for Food Access Initiatives

I am writing today to propose two items for County Council funding consideration in the Fiscal Year 2014 Operating Budget: $200,000 to support the Food Recovery Work Group's recommendation to implement a food recovery network; and $25,580 to support the Crossroads Community Food Network's recommended approach to launching the County's first farmers market "double dollars" program to increase access to healthy foods for low-income residents.

As you know, the problem of hunger is ever increasing in our county, as approximately one-third of County students currently qualify for free and reduced-priced meals (FARMs).

The Food Recovery Work Group, which I sponsored and was unanimously established by the County Council in October 2012, was asked to develop a report detailing how to create and implement a food recovery system in Montgomery County. The primary goal behind my sponsorship of the Food Recovery Work Group is to help end hunger in Montgomery County. The Work Group is evaluating best practices; mapping existing resources; identifying ways to enhance communication among non-profits, organizations, service providers, and food suppliers; and recommending any needed legislative changes to assist in these efforts. The Council is scheduled to receive the Work Group's Interim Report shortly.

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Councilmember.Ervin@montgomerycountymd.gov

One of the Work Group's primary interim recommendations is to set aside $200,000 in the FY14 Operating Budget to implement a food recovery network. Many steps will have to be taken to make a large scale food recovery network a reality, including: completing the resource mapping of existing and potential food donators and emergency food access sites; creating a mobile technology solution to match donors and emergency food providers; and creating and distributing information on the program, the Good Samaritan law, relevant health codes, and the tax benefits of food donation. While the Work Group discussed a variety of options to implement food recovery, at this time the Work Group is not making any recommendation on whether this funding should be used to create a new position or outsource work through a contract. Since funding will be needed to implement this important initiative, I believe the Council should set aside $200,000 in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) budget.

The Crossroads Community Food Network, represented on the Council's Work Group, opened in 2007 as part of an effort to give residents of the Takoma-Langley area better access to fresh, local produce. Together with the Takoma Park Farmers Market, it became the first in Maryland authorized to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Assistance (Senior FMNP). It is also among the first nationwide to match food vouchers with market "double dollars" to multiply the buying power of low-income shoppers. The Crossroads Network has established itself as a great model for providing fresh, nutritious foods to those in need.

The Crossroads Network has proposed a way to duplicate what they do on a larger scale across the county through a pilot farmers market vendor incentive program. Through this proposed initiative, it will administer the double dollars program at eight of the 21 farmers markets already equipped with electronic benefit transfer (EBT) machines capable of processing SNAP and other government-provided benefits during the 2013 season. This includes Burtonsville, Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Wheaton, and other the targeted areas for social services in the county. Crossroads will provide training, assistance, marketing and the distribution of the incentive funding. For your convenience, I have attached their proposal. This organization is uniquely situated to implement this initiative. I would like to request the addition of $25,580 in the FY14 Operating Budget in the HHS budget to implement this proposal.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact my office at 240-777-7960.

Attachment

c: Councilmembers
Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Department of Health & Human Services
Jeremy Criss, Agricultural Services, Department of Economic Development
Linda McMillan, Council Staff

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