
Message from the Council President

Budgets are guiding documents that establish priorities, reflect community needs, and underscore values. Montgomery County's \$7.6 billion Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Operating Budget and amendments to the Fiscal Year 2025-2030 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) fund our collective and essential priorities to meet the critical needs of our diverse community today, with an eye toward our ever-changing fiscal future. We have upheld our unyielding commitment to support education, public safety, social safety net services, and our dedicated employees who are essential to all areas of public service.



In Montgomery County, we continue to live by our values of being a welcoming and inclusive community with a thriving economy with the best education system to prepare our young people and families for the future. Our FY26 budget reflects that.

We worked with our public school system to make sure Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) received 99.8 percent of their budget request at \$3.6 billion, which comprises half of the County's overall budget. We laid a strong foundation to ensure we meet the needs of our students and families, as well as the needs of educators and school staff.

Public input was essential to constructing this budget. I'm proud that we bolstered community outreach, as we listened to the views of more than 300 residents during our budget public hearings. We also reviewed thousands of emails, took hundreds of calls, and met with numerous groups.

We are continuing to enhance public safety across Montgomery County with major investments in the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD), Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS), and first responders, including investments to expand the successful Drone as First Responder Program to Germantown.

The Council increased funding for the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security to provide continuity in emergency planning, training, and outreach, despite reductions and eliminations of federal grant funding. And we allocated \$1.2 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program to protect our nonprofit and faith organizations and houses of worship.

We prioritized resources for our social safety net programs. We are seeing an increase in needs in our community for food, housing, mental health and other basic needs, and this budget better prepares us to meet these challenges.

The Council approved nearly \$14 million for the Office of Food Systems Resilience to provide critical food resources. To combat rising rates of homelessness, we allocated \$62 million for Services to End and Prevent Homelessness, and over \$200 million in services to support children, youth and families, older adults and people with disabilities.

I am proud that we increased funding to \$66 million for Behavioral Health and Crisis Services, promoting mental health services, treatment and recovery services, and culturally competent care for people of all ages with behavioral health needs.

We are also investing in housing, transportation, and economic development, so that we not only meet the needs of our residents today but are also planning for the future.

We continued and increased funding for affordable housing assistance, recognizing the role that safe and affordable housing has as a social determinant of health. This includes \$81.4 million for the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) to preserve and increase the supply of affordable housing, \$58 million for Housing Initiative Fund resources to increase funding for rental assistance as well as finance, construct, and preserve affordable housing in the County, and nearly \$9 million for the Housing Opportunities Commission, which provides affordable and supportive services with the

mission of enhancing the lives of individuals and families with low to moderate incomes.

We are making Ride On bus service free for all riders in alignment with our transit equity and climate goals and to encourage ridership growth.

The Council approved economic development initiatives focused on job creation and business development. We allocated \$3.2 million in funding for WorkSource Montgomery which is standing up a specialized office to assist federal workers now looking for jobs, and \$5.3 million for the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC), which is the County's lead economic development organization. We also made ongoing investments in the Institute for Health Computing, which is creating jobs in AI and machine learning innovation.

Our parks and recreation spaces are among the most valued and defining assets of our community. We approved numerous recreation, parks and planning programs, including increased funding for the new Silver Spring Recreation and Aquatic Center. We funded the Montgomery County Green Bank in the amount of nearly \$17 million to ensure we continue our work on climate change.

As the Chair of the Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee, I am particularly glad that we crafted this budget including reserves of approximately 11.2 percent. We did all this while increasing our commitment to invest in our hardworking County employees, and without raising tax rates.

Producing a budget of this scale requires diligence, careful review and collaboration. We accomplished all these goals by coming together with residents, our non-profit partners, union members, our department staff and agency heads to balance our priorities and keep our residents at the forefront of every decision we made.

I'm proud of the way this Council has come together to prepare for the challenges ahead, as we budget for today and tomorrow.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Stewart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kate" and last name "Stewart" clearly legible.

Kate Stewart
President, Montgomery County Council