



WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD
Bethesda-Chevy Chase-North Bethesda-Rockville-Potomac

February 13, 2013

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Leggett:

Thank you for this opportunity to present the views of the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board (WMCCAB) in advance of the release of your recommended operating budget for fiscal year 2014 (FY2014). We particularly appreciate you coming to the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center (BCCRSC) on January 28th to hear from the WMCCAB and members of the community regarding our budget priorities.

The County has gone through a difficult time as our elected leaders have had to close a series of budget gaps caused, largely, by the troubled economic landscape. This year's estimated budget gap will be smaller than those of the past few years, but challenges remain as the needs are still great in many areas. In addition to the list of specific budgetary programs the community believes are especially important, we also want to make three general points.

First, we agree strongly with your focus on transportation funding. The state's transportation trust fund is quickly running out of money with most funds dedicated to system preservation and not new and necessary capital projects. This comes after years of belt tightening which has included dramatic cuts to Highway User Revenue, which has declined from \$467 million statewide to \$163 million last year, and too many occasions where transportation funding has been used for non-transportation pending. Montgomery County is the state's economic engine and a functioning transportation network including safe roads and efficient transit are key to our state's prosperity. Therefore, we endorse and encourage your efforts in Annapolis for statewide transportation funding solutions including a statewide increase to the gas tax, with the revenues directed to the transportation trust fund solely to be used for transportation funding.

Second, between FY10 and FY12, your Administration eliminated 1254 government positions. Last year, 92 positions were added to the government. As you eloquently explained, so many positions were eliminated that it was no longer a question of eliminating vacant slots but making changes that affected actual, working County employees. While we believe our government needs to be adequately staffed and support our public workforce, we urge caution and careful consideration as positions are added to the government. The County does not want to get into a situation in future years where it must eliminate positions once again.

Third, we also encourage the County to look for more opportunities for existing programs to achieve greater efficiency and savings through shared investments by multiple agencies. The County should look to increase the use of shared facilities or staff that can perform specialized functions for multiple departments. A multi-agency task force could be convened to identify such opportunities. Other opportunities may exist within annual maintenance programs. For example, the County Departments of Transportation and Environmental Protection could look for opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure into annual street resurfacing and maintenance efforts. Other communities have demonstrated that strategic investments in innovative green infrastructure techniques can produce improved water quality, pedestrian safety and neighborhood character within the existing budgets of current programs.

Based on input from the community, the WMCCAB would also like to highlight the following specific issues that are important to the business, non-profit and residential communities within the area we represent. We recognize the extraordinary challenge of balancing so many competing priorities.

School Resource Officers (SROs):

WMCCAB has long advocated for the SRO program and it has become only more important in the aftermath of recent events. It is time for the Police Department and Montgomery County Public Schools to put aside their differences over where the funding comes from and support this program. The SRO program helps to ensure that we provide safe and adequate school security, which provides our children with a secure and nurturing environment in which to learn. The program has been effective in promoting safety and positive community relations at the high school level. But for the last several years, this program has been cut repeatedly. There are just three SROs covering the eight high schools in the area we represent. If this program is further reduced or, even worse, entirely eliminated, a valuable relationship between a specific SRO and a school will be lost. For the SRO program to work, the officer must have adequate time to focus on a school and become a trusted figure there. This cannot happen if a single officer is responsible for numerous schools with thousands of students.

Regional Services Centers (RSCs):

The RSCs perform a valuable local governance service and must be maintained and strengthened. We are aware that there are those who believe the RSCs and their staffs are duplicative of other County officials, but these individuals fail to recognize the unique role played by the RSCs as conduits to the broader County government. The BCCRSC has been instrumental in coordinating public dialogue on Woodmont Triangle development and White Flint urban services; assisting emerging Senior villages; and increasing non-profit services for the public at the RSC. The BCCRSC has learned to make do with less, but continuing to shift funds, staff, and resources from the RSCs would negatively impact our community.

Public Libraries:

During the economic downturn that we are still emerging from, our Public Libraries' budget appeared to suffer more than any other program. Those cuts came at a time when the libraries are being used by more people for Internet and E-book services scarcely imaginable just a few years ago. Free Internet access for those searching for work has been a particularly crucial library service during the economic downturn. Last year's Public Libraries budget saw a slight increase after years of cuts, but the work is not yet finished. There is a significant need to improve and modernize the Public Libraries' collections and continue to provide Internet service and access. As you heard during the public meeting you attended, there is a strong desire in the community that your FY2014 budget proposal increase funding to put the Public Libraries on a trajectory to return to their 2008 funding level. In addition, the libraries are in need of continued maintenance and cleaning. Part of the County's facilities budget should be dedicated to the libraries.

Planning

Ensuring the Planning Department has adequate funding in the forthcoming budget is also important for the County's long-term fiscal health. Over the past few years, lack of funding has forced the County to delay sector planning efforts. Increased funding to update outdated plans, particularly in areas with good transit access, would support the kind of private investment that expands the County's tax base with less impact on the capital improvement program. For example, the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Central Business District Sector Plan is now almost twenty years old and in great need of an update. However, the process of producing detailed plans in a manner that builds adequate support from critical stakeholders requires adequate staff and budget.

We appreciate your consideration of these points as you craft your FY2014 budget request. Thank you again for addressing WMCCAB and the community in January.

Sincerely,



Marc Korman, Chair
Western Montgomery County
Citizens Advisory Board

CC: Montgomery County Council