

Montgomery County Council



# ADVOCACY GUIDE

Councilmember  
Marilyn Balcombe

As a County Councilmember, I hear from constituents who are advocating for a specific cause every day. I have also received hundreds of questions from constituents about how to best advocate for an issue they care about. In response, I have put together this guide that briefly explains the types of matters the County Council has jurisdiction over, and how constituents can best leverage their voice to impact decisions made by their local elected officials.

# WHAT IS THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL?

The Montgomery County Council is the legislative branch of Montgomery County. It may be helpful to think of the Council as the local equivalent of the United States Congress. The Council is made up of eleven councilmembers. Four of these councilmembers represent the entirety of Montgomery County and are called at-large councilmembers. Seven councilmembers represent specific districts and are therefore called district councilmembers. I am a district councilmember and represent District 2, which is made up of the Upper and Western portions of Montgomery County.

Each councilmember serves on at least two standing Council committees. There are seven Council standing committees total. I am a member of the Transportation and Environment (TE) committee and the Economic Development (ECON) committee. Each committee has budget review and program oversight responsibilities. In addition to serving on committees, councilmembers take part in the following responsibilities as a body.

In addition to being the legislative branch of Montgomery County government and its policymaking body, one of the primary functions of the Council is to assist constituents in navigating County government agencies.

Issues the Council can help you navigate include housing, shelter, rent assistance, landlord-tenant affairs, trash pickup, permitting services, road repairs, pedestrian safety, street light outages, RideOn, and much more.

## WHAT DOES THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL DO?

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- Appropriate money to fund the capital budget and operating budget. Set the local property tax rate and other local taxes.
- Approve all land use plans prepared by the Planning Board and act on zoning changes.
- Enact all Montgomery County laws and amendments to the code.
- Set the tax rates required to fund the Montgomery County budgets.
- Approve the six-year capital improvements program (CIP).
- Approve the Montgomery County Ten Year Solid Waste and Water Supply and Sewerage System Plans.
- Exercise oversight over Montgomery County programs to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.
- Serve as the Board of Health for Montgomery County.
- Confirm major appointments made by the County Executive and appoint the members of the Montgomery County Planning Board and the Board of Appeals.
- Direct and review the annual independent audit of Montgomery County operations.

# WHAT ARE THE CURRENT MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL COMMITTEES?

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (ECON)**

Issues relating to Alcohol Beverage Services, Agritourism, Conference and Visitors Bureau, Economic Development, Incubator Programs, MCEDC, Permitting Services, Revenue Authority, Small Business Advancement Team, Telecommunications and Technology (Office of Broadband Programs, Digital Equity, FiberNet programs), Urban Districts/BIDs, Worksource.

## **EDUCATION AND CULTURE (EC)**

Issues relating to Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College, Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy, and Community use of Public Facilities.

## **GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND FISCAL POLICY (GO)**

Economic and fiscal policy; spending affordability; County Government administrative departments; Department of General Services; cable and telecommunications issues; technology issues; personnel and compensation issues; procurement policy; oversight of interagency teams on training, public information, procurement, and PEG (public, education, and government) cable television channels.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)**

The Department of Health and Human Services and all associated issues and organizations and Office of Human Rights.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY (PS)**

The Police Department, State's Attorney's Office, the Circuit Court, Sheriff's Office, Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Commission; Fire and Rescue Service, Emergency Management and Homeland Security; Animal Control and Office of Consumer Protection.

## **TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENT (TE)**

Climate change, energy policy, water and sewer issues and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission; issues relating to environmental protection and conservation, including forest conservation; and solid waste, County infrastructure issues including public transportation, roadway and street construction and maintenance.

## **AUDIT**

Issues relating to external and internal audits of Montgomery County.

# HOW CAN CONSTITUENTS BEST ADVOCATE FOR THE ISSUES THAT MATTER TO THEM?

There are many ways to advocate. Constituents may choose to send emails, call councilmember offices, attend Council and committee sessions, testify during public hearings, and request meetings with councilmembers. All of these are methods by which you can provide feedback on a specific issue. It is important to understand the legislative process when advocating for a specific issue.

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

## **Introduction**

A councilmember, the Council, or a Council committee will introduce a bill during a legislative session of the Montgomery County Council.

## **Public Hearing**

The bill is then placed on the agenda for a public hearing, which is an opportunity for the public to offer its comments about the legislation either in-person, virtually, or in writing.

## **Committee Work Session**

Each piece of legislation is assigned to its relevant committee for discussion before it goes to the full Council for a vote. The committee members will make a preliminary recommendation on the bill.

## **Full Council Work Session**

After the legislation has gone through committee, it will head to the full Council for a vote. Majority of 6 votes is required to enact a law.

## **Delivery to the County Executive**

Legislation enacted by the Council is delivered to the County Executive, who has 10 days to approve or disapprove it. If the CE vetoes the bill, the Council has 60 days to override the veto. If the CE does not sign the legislation within 10 days, the legislation becomes law without signature.

## **Enactment of the Law**

Legislation will take effect 91 days after its enactment, unless it has been expedited. Only legislation that meets specific criteria can be expedited.

# BEST PRACTICES AND STEPS FOR ADVOCACY

## **WHAT: Identify the issue**

The first step in advocating is identifying your issue and understanding who has jurisdiction over it. For example, if you wanted to advocate for eviction protections, you would connect with councilmembers on the Planning, Housing, and Parks committee.

## **WHERE: Find out where the issue is in the legislative process**

This will help you identify who to contact with your advocacy. If the bill is in the public hearing stage, you should participate in the hearing, if it's on its way to committee, you would reach out to the committee members, etc.

## **WHO: Mobilize your community**

Now its time to find others who will advocate for your issue with you. You should inform others about what you are advocating for, and organize a group who will join you in your advocacy.

## **HOW: Begin reaching out to councilmembers**

Once you put together a group, you can begin advocating. You can send emails, make phone calls, write letters, etc.

## **WHEN: Show up and be seen**

If you are able to, you may wish to attend the in-person committee or Council sessions where your issue is being discussed. You can hold signs, but cannot disrupt the meeting. This is an opportunity to showcase the coalition you've built.

## **Follow up after the issue is complete**

Once the legislation you are advocating about is finalized, you should follow up with the elected officials you were in touch with, so that they know you as a community leader. This can be a simple email follow up acknowledging the elected official's role in the issue.

# AN ADVOCACY EXAMPLE

Let's say you wanted to advocate for the passage of a bill that would ban plastic take out containers. Legislation like this would go to the Transportation and Environment committee.

## Participate in the public hearing

Step one will be signing up to speak at the public hearing for this legislation. Sign-up information can be found on the County Council website at [montgomerycountymd.gov/council](http://montgomerycountymd.gov/council). During the public hearing, you will voice your opinion on the legislation during the allotted amount of time. You can participate in the public hearing virtually or in-person.

## Write to committee members

Following the public hearing, the next step is to begin communicating with members of the committee where the legislation will be handled. For this example, that is the Transportation and Environment committee. You should reach out to the committee's members individually to encourage them to support your position. You can find committee member names and emails here:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/about/committees.html>

## Write to the full Council

Once the legislation moves out of committee to the full Council, it is time to expand your outreach to all eleven councilmembers. You can use the same technique you did for the committee outreach.

## OPTIONAL: ATTEND COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL MEETINGS WITH SIGNS

## Final follow up after the issue is done

Writing to councilmembers after the issue is complete helps them identify you as a leader related to that issue. Maybe they will reach out to you if similar legislation is introduced in the future, or let you know that there is an opening on an environment related community board. It is important to follow up after an issue, to maintain the relationship you have built.

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S BUDGET PROCESS

Each year, the Council undertakes the Montgomery County budget process. This is a twofold process that includes the capital budget (focused on major expenditures and infrastructure projects) and the operating budget (focused on the fiscal requirements of the County during a single fiscal year). It is the Council's task to review the spending proposals put together by the County Executive. The Council is the final authority on spending by Montgomery County departments, and well as the independent County and bi-county agencies such as MCPS, Montgomery College, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, and the Montgomery County Planning Board.

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S BUDGET PROCESS

## **January 15th:**

County Executive submits proposed Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and capital budget to the Council.

## **February:**

CIP public hearings are held by the County Council.

## **No later than March 15th:**

County Executive submits proposed operating budget to the Council.

## **April:**

Operating budget public hearings are held by the County Council.

## **April - May:**

The County Council deliberates the budget.

## **No later than June 1st:**

The County Council takes final action on the budget.

## **July 1st:**

New fiscal year begins.

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS' BUDGET PROCESS

The Montgomery County Council DOES NOT oversee the school system. That is the responsibility of the separately elected Montgomery County Board of Education. The Council allocates funding to the school system during the annual budget cycle, but the Council DOES NOT have the authority to direct MCPS to utilize the funds in a specific manner. The Montgomery County Council DOES NOT have oversight authority over the school system. Montgomery County Public Schools puts together its own budget proposal, which is reviewed by the County Executive and approved by the Montgomery County Council. The Council DOES NOT create the MCPS budget. The County's budget schedule begins after MCPS' budget schedule.

If the issue you are advocating for is MCPS related, your advocacy to the County Council should begin after the Council has received the budget from the County Executive. Remember, while the Council allocates funds to MCPS, the school system decides how to spend them. If you are interested in advocating for a specific MCPS budget item, you should direct your correspondence to the Superintendent and Board of Education.

# THE MCPS BUDGET PROCESS

## **October:**

MCPS Superintendent recommends a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and capital budget to the Board of Education.

## **November:**

Board of Education reviews budget recommendation, holds public hearings and work sessions. Board approves budget request and submits it to the County Executive.

## **December:**

MCPS Superintendent recommends operating budget.

## **January:**

Board of Education reviews budget recommendation.

## **February:**

Board approves operating budget request and submits it to the County Executive.

## **March - May:**

County Executive and County Council review the budget request.

## **May:**

County Council takes final action on the CIP, capital budget, and operating budget.

## **June:**

Board of Education approves the final budgets.

# BUDGET RELATED ADVOCACY

## **Identify the issue and where it is in the process**

You should figure out where your issue is in the budget process, using the previous guidance. This will help you figure out who to submit your advocacy to.

## **Check if the issue is a County issue, or an MCPS issue**

You should also identify whether the issue is a County budget issue, or an MCPS issue. Remember - the County Council does not put together MCPS' budget.

## **Mobilize your community**

Now its time to find others who will advocate for your issue. You should inform others about what you are advocating for and involve them in your process.

## **Begin reaching out**

Once you put together a group, you can begin advocating. You can send emails, make phone calls, write letters, etc. It's important that you are advocating to the right people.

## **Show up and be seen**

If you are able to, you may wish to attend the in-person meetings where your issue is being discussed. You can hold signs, but cannot disrupt the meeting.

## **Follow up after the issue is complete**

Once the matter is done, you should follow up with the elected officials you were in touch with. This can be a simple email follow up acknowledging the elected official's role in the issue.

# CONTACT INFORMATION FOR COUNCILMEMBERS (AND THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE)

This information is available at the County Council website at  
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/members/index.html>

*Please note that this information is accurate as of March 18, 2026.*

## **Marilyn Balcombe, District 2**

Councilmember.Balcombe@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7960  
Committees: ECON, TE, AUDIT

## **Shebra Evans, At-Large**

Councilmember.Evans@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7959  
Committees: EC, GO, AUDIT

## **Natali Fani-González, District 6**

Councilmember.Fani-González@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7870  
Committees: ECON (Chair), PHP, AUDIT

## **Andrew Friedson, District 1**

Councilmember.Friedson@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7828  
Committees: PHP (Chair), HHS

## **Evan Glass, At-Large**

Councilmember.Glass@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7966  
Committees: ECON, TE (Chair)

## **Will Jawando, At-Large**

Councilmember.Jawando@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7811  
Committees: EC (Chair), PHP

## **Sidney Katz, District 3**

Councilmember.Katz@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7906  
Committees: PS (Chair), GO, AUDIT

## **Dawn Luedtke, District 7**

Councilmember.Luedtke@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7860  
Committees: HHS, PS

## **Kristin Mink, District 5**

Councilmember.Mink@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7955  
Committees: EC, PS

## **Laurie-Anne Sayles, At-Large**

Councilmember.Sayles@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7964  
Committees: ECON, HHS (Chair)

## **Kate Stewart, District 4**

Councilmember.Stewart@  
montgomerycountymd.gov  
240-777-7968  
Committees: GO (Chair), AUDIT (Chair)

## **County Executive Marc Elrich**

County.Executive@  
montgomerycountymd.gov