



Dear District 1 Residents and Friends,

Last week the Council passed our Fiscal Year 2010 Budget. I wanted to share with you my perspective on the final product, along with a few dates to mark on your calendars. I hope that this email finds you enjoying the smell of freshly cut grass and the warm weather that has finally come our way!

Sincerely,

Roger Berliner
Montgomery County Council, District 1

A Good Budget in Tough Times

After months of deliberations, and a last minute unwelcome response from the State Board of Education, the Council passed a good budget in tough times.

Spending for county government services will be 2.2 percent lower than last year, the sharpest decrease in almost two decades; 400 jobs were eliminated; and our employees gave up their cost-of-living increases. At the same time, we kept our commitment to honor the charter limit on property taxes, and even provided for a \$690 tax credit for homeowners.

The Council's priorities, like those of the County Executive, were to make sure that we strengthened our "safety net" of services for the increasing number of county residents who are suffering economically during this difficult time; to provide the resources required to ensure the public safety; and to essentially fully fund the school board's request for MCPS and to keep all school improvement projects on schedule. We did all of that.

We also differed a bit from the County Executive, as would be expected in a \$4.39 billion budget. The County Executive had proposed closing the Bethesda police station from midnight to 6 am. Officers would have still been on their beats, but the public would not have been able to enter the station as it can now. Ultimately, I was not comfortable with

that proposal, and I moved to put back in the money to keep the station open. My colleagues agreed.

We also were committed to maintaining Ride On services which the County Executive had proposed cutting. While I differed from my colleagues with respect to the details of how we achieved this result, I was equally committed to this goal, and am pleased that at a time when we need to do all we can to get people out of their cars, we were able to keep the buses running.

We also were able to achieve budget savings that the County Executive had not proposed. For example, our County can reduce its consumption of energy, and energy costs are a very significant part of our operating budget. At my suggestion, the Council approved cutting our energy budget by 4%, effectively directing our government to turn out lights when they are not needed, to unplug computers when not in use, and to do all the things that we know will save both money and the planet simply by changing our habits. This proposal saved over \$1 million.

We differed from the County Executive as well on his proposal to impose an “ambulance fee.” While it would have generated \$12 million in revenue, the proposal has been fiercely fought by our incredible cadre of volunteer fire fighters. I, along with Council President Andrews, Councilmember Ervin, and Councilmember Trachtenberg were never persuaded that the revenue was more important than the non-monetary costs that this proposal would impose. We, as a Council, did not approve it.

Finally, the County Executive’s budget assumed that the State Board of Education (BOE) would grant a \$79 million “waiver” from the “maintenance of effort” requirement. This waiver request had the joint support of MCPS and the School Board. When the State BOE turned down that request with only a week left for us to finalize our budget, we had to turn to plan B. Under that plan, also supported by the County Executive and MCPS, we shifted \$79 million in school construction bond costs that had been coming out of the County’s operating budget to the school system for Fiscal Year 2010. This is consistent with what Anne Arundel County has done for years. The alternative to this approach would have resulted in further reduction of services to County residents that many have come to rely upon like library hours, recreational opportunities, public safety services, and programs for the most vulnerable. I, like my colleagues, was relieved to avoid such reductions.

While there are signs that the economy is beginning to pick up, next year, budget-wise, will be even tougher. We will have few places to go for revenue and harder choices to make for cuts. But, that’s next year. For now, let’s appreciate for at least a moment that we were able to be both fiscally and socially responsible in a very difficult economy.

I know this summary is not going to do it for those of you who want all the details. Click [here](#) for a more expansive list of budget highlights.

Calling All Community Leaders

Civic and Homeowner Associations: In order to disseminate timely information that may be useful to your communities and neighborhoods, we would like to keep a comprehensive and updated database of District 1 civic and homeowners associations. Please help us by calling 240-777-7828 or emailing us at councilmember.berliner@montgomerycountymd.gov anytime with the name of your organization, the current president's name, e-mail address, street address and phone number. We promise to use the contact information judiciously and will not share it with any other parties.

Save the Date: Next Senior Forum - June 19

On March 6, 2009, I was delighted to host what I thought was an informative, timely, and enjoyable forum for seniors at the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Rescue Squad. Many thanks again to the Rescue Squad, Senator Ben Cardin, Mr. Stan Hinden, and Commander Russ Hammill for participating in the forum, and many thanks to all of you who attended. My staff is hard at work planning the next Senior Forum, set for Friday, June 19 again at the Rescue Squad. I will be in touch again closer to the date with further details.

Save the Date: Next District 1 Forum - June 29

I will be hosting my next District 1 Forum at the Potomac Library on Monday, June 29 at 7:30 pm. As always, please come with any thoughts, questions, or concerns you have to share with me. I will be ready to listen.