



April 2, 2021

**Written Testimony for Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budgets and amendments to the Capital Budget and FY21-26 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) – in support of increases in funding for Climate Change, Racial Equity & Social Justice, Parks, Stormwater and Transit.**

**Submitted by**

**Eliza Cava**

Director of Conservation, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

**Denisse Guitarra**

Maryland Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

---

Dear Montgomery County Council,

For 124 years, Audubon Naturalist Society has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. We thank the Council for the opportunity to provide testimony for the Montgomery County FY 22 Operating Budget, Capital budget and CIP. ANS asks the County Council to approve the budget requests for five priority areas:

1. Climate change
2. Racial equity & social justice
3. Parks
4. Stormwater
5. Transit

Although much of our county's new budget needs are and should be focused on addressing the current public health crisis, we strongly advocate for a sustainable post-covid recovery plan which also addresses the four concurrent public health, social & racial, economic and climate crises. We would also like to highlight that currently the Environment section only gets 2.8% of the total operating budget. This is relatively a small slice of the pie when knowing that climate change will have and already has a direct impact on all of us, all our infrastructure, and is a threat multiplier

Woodend Sanctuary | 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815 | 301-652-9188

Rust Sanctuary | 802 Childrens Center Road, Leesburg, Virginia 20175 | 703-669-0000

[anshome.org](http://anshome.org)

across all the other ongoing crises. We ask the Council to consider and carefully review our budget requests as presented in our testimony, and to go further and actively seek the funds needed to implement the new Climate Action Plan.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE:**

ANS asks the County Council to approve and fully fund the Climate Change Planning Program at **\$0.65M**.<sup>1</sup> These funds will help the County continue with the implementation phases of the County Climate Action Plan.<sup>2</sup> We further advocate the need to prioritize, diversify, and genuinely include more people and communities of color into the climate action plan policies, actions, and decision-making processes. To accomplish this we must also increase the funds that are allocated towards creating meaningful and culturally relevant engagement opportunities of these groups and individuals into climate action planning. We ask the Council to also coordinate the Climate Action Plan efforts with the Planning Department and other county agencies.

### **RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

ANS asks the County Council to approve and fully fund the Racial Equity & Social Justice Program (RESJ) at **1.0M**.<sup>3</sup> Although this is a great start towards aligning and addressing the racial inequities and social injustice disparities seen across the county, which have surfaced even more during the pandemic, we ask that more funds are allocated towards the expansion and the implementation of RESJ across all agencies and departments in Montgomery County. There is also a need to create and establish more funding mechanisms to create healing opportunities across communities, to prioritize transformational relationships between government and communities and create a culture of change, inclusion, acceptance, and empowerment to those who have historically been left out of important decision-making processes.

### **PARKS:**

It is critical now more than ever to continue to fund the Department of Parks. During the ongoing pandemic, our Parks are serving as natural refuges keeping people healthy both physically and mentally. It is more important than ever that the Parks Department has adequate staff and resources to continue protection of these invaluable natural resources and to assure a healthier future for all. The staff of our Parks and Environmental Departments are dedicated public servants who work hard, in concert with the public, to steward these resources and they have long been supported by both the Council and voters.

---

<sup>1</sup> Climate Change Planning Program. Montgomery County Operating Budget FY 2022. Available from: <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/basisoperating/Common/BudgetSnapshot.aspx?ID=99P54&TYPE=E>

<sup>2</sup> Montgomery County Climate Action Plan (2020) Available from: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/Resources/Files/climate/draft-climate-action-plan.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Racial Equity & Social Justice. Montgomery County Operating Budget FY 2022. Available from: <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/basisoperating/Common/Department.aspx?ID=25D>

Montgomery Parks Department emphasizes stewardship of natural resources in its Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan. Natural resource stewardship, including protection of our many stream valleys located in local parkland, is always challenging to fund by comparison to more visible, constructed infrastructure. In fact, Parks requires operating budget increases to protect our precious natural places by removing invasive species, stabilizing eroding stormwater outfalls, planting native trees, restoring stream buffers, and connecting natural spaces together in green corridors for wildlife, waterways, and people alike. ANS urges the Council to fund the Department of Park's full request of **\$119M** for FY22.<sup>4</sup>

### **STORMWATER:**

Montgomery County has done great work meeting regulatory requirements for stormwater: but these requirements are not enough to protect our streams and watersheds. **The current draft stormwater permit, which covers the next five years, and which this budget is designed to meet, requires only half the rate of stormwater management installation as the last permit required.**

While some watersheds' health has been improving, many are still declining. What streams need is getting harder, too: in the summer, climate change drives more explosive storms that overwhelm the kinds of projects installed to date; and in the winter, more and more salt ahead of unpredictable snowstorms leads to toxic salinity conditions in streams--we are seeing that right now. The Department, its staff, and its contractors have demonstrated that they are capable of doing more than the next draft permit requires. Environmental groups like ours have been strongly pressing the state to require more ambitious stormwater management, especially using green infrastructure throughout our watersheds and out of stream valleys. Council should direct the Department to go above and beyond the minimum permit requirements; and Council should be prepared to fund a greater amount of work if the state requires it, as they should. If in order to fund more stormwater management projects, we need to further raise the Water Quality Protection Charge, we ask council to consider raising the charge. We also ask that part of the WQPC funds to be used to conduct more public outreach and engagement as part of the County's goal of broadening and diversifying the number of people actively participating in water quality protection projects and initiatives.

Additionally, we ask the Council to work cooperatively with DEP and Parks to ensure that both agencies' priority stormwater management projects are funded from accessible revenue sources. Following changes stemming from the 2018 CIP budget, Parks is now seeking loan funding from

---

<sup>4</sup> MNCPPC – Montgomery Parks FY22 Proposed Budget. Available from:  
<https://www.montgomeryparks.org/uploads/2021/03/FY22-Proposed-Budget-Summary.pdf>

state and federal clean water loan programs but must finalize and sign an MOU with DEP in order to be eligible to receive the loans. The agencies are working hard to respond creatively to Council's past budgetary directions, and to save taxpayers money while still implementing stormwater management. We ask that Council support their requests and ensure that both agencies are funded in a truly sustainable and accessible manner, whether through successful loan applications or cash infusions from the Water Quality Protection Fund or general funds if needed.

Furthermore, specifically in the DEP operating budget requests we strongly and enthusiastically support the addition of **\$100K** each to: continuing the anti-litter campaign; enhancing watershed grants; expanding on the RainScapes Program; and supporting a new manager position that will enforce environmental laws.<sup>5</sup>

Some additional budget requests we would like to have included under DEP's budget for watershed restoration include creating a dedicated budget item for maintenance, especially for stream inspections, as well as revising the process of granting waivers on stormwater requirements for re-development. According to our research, these are currently granted very frequently but difficult to track due to limitations in DPS' systems. We need to know how much volume of water is being waived, and where, in order to accurately address the issues of both water quality in streams and nuisance lot-to-lot flooding. We suggest raising the stormwater waiver fees as they are currently insufficient to address the water quality and quantity our neighborhoods, communities and watersheds need.

### **TRANSIT:**

In Montgomery County, the transportation sector is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. The County must reduce its emissions by investing more in transit to move people around safely and efficiently. We ask Council to support the Montgomery County's Better Buses Campaign<sup>6</sup> asks to keep Ride On bus services fare free and funded and to continue to increase transit accessibility to communities across the county who use public transit to mobilize and get around. In the Capital Budget we support the allocation of **1.5M** towards redesigning Ride On bus services to meet the needs and demands of our county's residents.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> FY22 Operating Budget recommendations for Department of Environmental Protection. Watershed Restoration. Available from: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/FY22/psprec/66-EnvironmentalProtection-FY2022-REC-Publication-Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> MoCo Better Buses Campaign. Available from: [https://www.smartergrowth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Montgomery-Better-Buses-Platform\\_Dec2020\\_Final.pdf](https://www.smartergrowth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Montgomery-Better-Buses-Platform_Dec2020_Final.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> FY22 – FY26 Capital Budget Ride On Bus Route Restructuring Study. Available from: <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Project.aspx?ID=P502107&CID=3&SCID=12>

The Capital Improvements Plan mentions the allocation of funds for the MD 355 BRT<sup>8</sup>, Veirs Mill Road BRT<sup>9</sup>, and R29 BRT.<sup>10</sup> These countywide BRT projects should be prioritized as a key to combat the climate crisis. Assuring BRT funds will increase the County residents' confidence and security in using public transit as their preferred transportation mode. By investing in transit projects, the County secures protection of our valuable green spaces and waterways--as opposed to highway expansions, which would only degrade these precious spaces by incentivizing sprawl development patterns.

On behalf of ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters, we recommend that the County Council supports the passage and fully fund our Parks, Climate Change, Stormwater and Transportation programs in this FY22 Operating and CIP budgets. We believe allocating funds these programs it is important for the wellbeing of county residents, wildlife, and our waterways.

Sincerely,

Eliza Cava  
ANS Director of Conservation

Denisse Guitarra  
ANS Conservation Advocate

---

<sup>8</sup> FY22 CIP – MD 355 BRT. Available from:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/basisoperating/Common/Chapter.aspx?ID=CIP>

<sup>9</sup> FY22 CIP Veirs Mill Road - Available from:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Project.aspx?ID=P501913>

<sup>10</sup> FY22 CIP R29. Available from:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Project.aspx?ID=P501912>