

Neil J. Hartbarger  
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**My comments on the proposed Montgomery County 2023 Operating Budget and Public Services Program**

I'm proud to be a Marylander. I'm proud to call myself a member of the Montgomery County community, the Silver Spring Community, the Woodmoor community. I love my neighbors—the ones across the street who know my business, the ones I make eye contact with in our local stores and public spaces, and the ones I haven't even met yet. I love their kids, too—all of them.

I've lived in the County for almost 22 years. During that time I've met a number of County public servants, including two or three members of the County Council. They are all deeply thoughtful, reasoning, compassionate people, sharing the goal of the greatest good for the greatest number. During the past 22 years I've seen that goal realized in large ways and small. I've witnessed the disagreements, as different approaches are brought to the fore and debated for their hoped-for merits and possible down sides. But even the most heated disagreements are still among people of good will and benevolent intentions. I trust the Country leadership to try their best to do the best for all of us.

That's especially crucial for the young, the elder, and the vulnerable. We all have a responsibility as members of this community to come together and provide a good, safe, nurturing environment for those with the greatest need and the least power.

It's also clear from my quick review of the year-over-year changes in the proposed budget for 2023 that the County can't depend on steady, predictable funds from other government sources, like the State and Federal governments. Sometimes that money is good, and sometimes it isn't. *In many ways, we're on our own.* Fortunately, we are blessed in Montgomery County—there's enough to go around.

For these reasons, I'm happy to pay my County taxes and fees. If I need to contribute a little more in real property tax to provide a high-quality education for *all* of our students, I am more than willing—I'm proud to participate in this great democratic tradition of care.

What does that mean—"democratic tradition of care"?

It is my strong opinion that democracy, expressed through government, is the most powerful means for us to carry out our care for one another as members of the community. We express our priorities for our community through our elected representatives, and we put our money down to manifest those priorities. It isn't voluntary, like church or club—we're all in, all the time. And the lights are on 24 x 7.

For all of us.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Neil J. Hartbarger  
Silver Spring