

Testimony of Link Hoewing  
Chair, Fair Access Committee for the Western County  
FY26 CIP Budget  
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I am Link Hoewing of the Fair Access Committee for the Western County. We are focused on equity for our area and ensuring we can support our residents, make life more convenient and full of opportunity, and help make our area attractive for visitors from all over the DMV.

We appreciate that the Council last year approved funding for a new Western County Community Center that includes a first in the county clinic space so desperately needed in our area. We are very disappointed that the new budget proposal does not move up funding for the Center project to this coming fiscal year. The current plan will not allow construction to begin until 2029 and the Center won't be completed until 2030.

As the county itself says in its analysis of the project: **“There is a great need for the envisioned facility as no such facility currently exists in Western Montgomery County.”** The Town of Poolesville has

moved ahead quickly to find and assign through a lease to the county a park it owns that is an ideal location for the Center, saving taxpayers money and clearing the way to move ahead as soon as possible. **The county should do so.**

The budget proposal also does not include the innovative, cost-efficient proposal the Committee made to install a pool bubble system on the Sarah E. Auer outdoor pool so it can be used year-round. The pool is only open for three to four months a year and sits idle and unused for much of the time.

Meanwhile, the swim team, young families, and older adults who need the facility for everything from practice to rehab exercises must get to facilities that are sometimes fifteen miles or more away. The Sarah E. Auer pool had almost 17,000 daily admission visits last year in just a little over three months and generated tens of thousands of dollars to support the pool. We also have more than 200 swimmers on our very successful swim teams who use the pool.

Think of how much more the pool could do for our community and the rest of the county if it could become a year-round facility. We could not only use

the facility for practices and family entertainment year-round in a convenient nearby setting. We could also hold our own competitions and events of all kinds, attracting visitors from other areas. The County really needs more indoor pools because demand is high, and this would cost effectively add another indoor pool.

The Committee has done the hard work of researching this technology and developing a proposed budget. It is far less expensive than a bricks and mortar approach and is more than workable based on our research. As we always do, the Committee is proposing an innovative solution that is affordable and fits the needs of our area.

These proposals are modest in size - especially compared to the overall capital budget - but to our small community, they would have a major and positive impact on the lives of so many residents. **We urge county leaders to reconsider these projects and fund them in the upcoming fiscal year.**