

Council President Kate Stewart
Councilmembers
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20815



April 1, 2025

Testimony on: Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Operating Budget

Dear Council President Stewart and Councilmembers,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the FY26 operating budget. Zero Waste Montgomery County is a dedicated group of local residents who have been advocating for Zero Waste programs and closing of the incinerator in Montgomery County over many years. It has involved many discussions with the County Executive and their personnel, Montgomery County Councilmembers and the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

County Executive Elrich and the DEP announced on November 25th, 2024 plans to extend the contract to burn trash in Montgomery County beyond the current contract end date in April 2026 and published a new timeline to again extend incineration until at least 2030. The County Council had an opportunity to act before the March 25, 2025 deadline to stop the extension of the contract. This deadline is now passed, the contract is or will be extended to continue trash incineration in Montgomery County and we still do not have full information about the terms of the contract.

New Expenses to subsidize the Incinerator's Operation:

We are very concerned about Montgomery County's strategy in managing Solid Waste Disposal services for residents and businesses in this county. Without providing any explanation, the County intends to spend \$35.5 million dollars as operating expenses related to continuing to use the trash incinerator in the FY26 proposed budget. It's unknown how much the County plans to spend on the same line item in fiscal years 2027, 2028, however, if we have to spend \$35.5 per year, that adds up to more than 100 million dollars spent on a facility that we are planning to close. While we applaud that Councilmember Glass has amended the Solid Waste Plan to include that DEP should be planning to do zero waste "concurrently" while analyzing and establishing plans to close the incinerator, plans that will accelerate the ability for the county to close the incinerator must also be **implemented** concurrently. Doing so can save the county money and move us more rapidly to a more sustainable solid waste management system.

The potential job losses in Montgomery County due to the new administration pose a significant threat to the local economy and the county's financial stability. According to an interview with Council President Kate Stewart on wamu.org on January 24th, with 70,000 Montgomery County residents employed by the federal government (that does not include contractors), any reduction in federal jobs would have far-reaching consequences. As the county faces budget constraints and increased demand for services, large capital investments and significant increase in operating expenses in Solid Waste disposal services would be challenging to justify.

Increased Solid Waste Service Charge for Businesses and Households:

The County is planning to cover the significant increase in Solid Waste Disposal services operating expenses and the capital investments in Shade Grove Transfer Station by increasing the Solid Waste Surcharge for businesses and households. The T&E Committee has requested at the March 17, 2025 work session the DEP to provide a detailed breakdown of how different projects would impact the rates. This information and answers to many other questions asked by the County Council members from DEP at the briefing on January 28, 2025 must be made publicly available as soon as possible.

Existing Operating Funds to Upgrade the Dickerson Composting Facility:

And finally, we appreciate that the funds that were allocated to upgrade the Dickerson Composting Facility are still available and as we've stated many times, the Sugarloaf Citizens Association is ready to negotiate the composting of food scraps at that site, DEP has not follow up with them about this and the Council needs to ensure that this project moves forward rapidly, since it is a key element for executing the plans to close the incinerator.

Additionally, we call upon the Council to get DEP to provide a public document that provides the plans for emergency contingency actions to be taken in the event that there is another fire at the incinerator or other adverse events.

Once again, we strongly urge you to provide the public with full details about the increased operating expense related to the trash incinerator, and consider alternative more cost effective solutions in Solid Waste Disposal services. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Eisendrath
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Zero Waste Montgomery County

<https://zwmc.org/>

