



CLIMATE COALITION
Montgomery County, MD

To: Council President Friedson and Council Members
From: Climate Coalition Montgomery County
Date: April 7, 2025
RE: FY26 Budget Request

Dear Council President Stewart and Council Members

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the FY26 operating budget. The 20 member organizations of the Climate Coalition Montgomery County strongly support, with amendments, the County Executive's budget proposals that address the climate emergency, including ongoing base programs, proposed budget increases for FY26, and the funding allocation of utility energy tax revenue for the Green Bank, albeit with some further revisions.

We especially draw your attention to areas that we ask Council to address that fall short in the Executive's budget:

A. Increase Funding to achieve meaningful outcomes in these areas:

1. **Montgomery County Green Bank funding:** Bill 44-21 requires the County to appropriate 10-percent of the revenue received by the County from the fuel energy tax each year to the Green Bank, although the final appropriation is subject to Council approval. For FY 26, the County Executive has recommended \$15.7M, which is \$3.4M less than in FY25. The reason for the decrease is due an adjustment for the FY26 energy tax projection (\$1.1M) and a lower transfer due to "affordability". Since the Green Bank is just now beginning to implement the recently approved Building Energy Performance Standards regulations, the most important adjustment to the County Executives proposed budget is to restore the full 10% allocation of \$18.0M, based only on adjusting for the decrease in energy tax projection for FY26. This is especially critical due to the expected losses in the Green Bank's GGRF federal grant resulting from the federal administration's cuts and claw-backs.
2. **Solar Strategic Implementation Plan (\$180K):** A roadmap for increasing development of solar installations is a key element of the Climate Action Plan. This solar installation includes rooftop solar on residential and commercial properties, ground-mounted solar installations, community solar in various configurations, and utility scale solar. Funding to develop a Solar Strategic Plan will provide consultant support to the Department of Environment (DEP) to research and prepare this roadmap, which will serve as the blueprint for the County's work to expand solar deployment to help meet the County's climate change goals.
3. **Planning Department climate policy planner:** Last year Council declined to fund the Planning Department's request for a climate policy planner for land use planning which plays a

significant role in climate change. We urge you to fund that position this year to more effectively incorporate actions to reach the goals of both the Climate Action Plan and of Thrive. Separately, please also note that it has been over two years since Council approved climate assessments of all bills, master plans, and ZTAs. As called for in the bill, a scheduled review and update to the climate assessment modeling approach is required.

4. **Parks Department CIP and operating budget:** We also urge you to reject the County Executive's proposal to cut \$2M from the Parks Department CIP and to restore its operating budget consistent with other County Department funding levels. The year after year erosion of Parks Department funding risks degrading this important environmental function that plays a vital role in managing climate change and providing respite to residents from the impacts of climate change.

B. In addition to the above areas requiring your particular attention, the Climate Coalition Montgomery County fully supports the Executive's proposals for increased funding as follows:

1. For DEP:

- \$1.2M added for design of a Material Recovery and Biological Treatment facility (in CIP)
- \$250K added to existing \$82K for implementing the amended bag fee law

2. For the Department of Government Services:

- \$2.4M added to existing \$5.3 M for Solar Resiliency Hubs
- \$9.7M added to existing \$15M for additional Green Fleet buses
- \$3.9M for EV charging stations at County facilities

3. For Climate Non-Departmental Account:

- \$230K added to continue funding the public outreach pilot program.

C. The Climate Coalition also supports funding proposed by the County Executive for:

1. **Reestablish the Office of Peoples' Counsel (OPC)** The Climate Coalition MoCo urges Council to allocate \$261,580 and 2 FTE to reestablish the OPC which was disbanded in 2008. The OPC's role is to protect the public interest, to promote full and fair administrative proceedings, and to help produce sound land use decisions, especially those related to Thrive Montgomery. Having a functioning OPC serves the public interest by enabling transparent and meaningful public understanding and participation in difficult decisions, including those we have to make to address climate change. It helps level the playing field between developers and ordinary residents. Now, more than ever, residents would benefit from the technical assistance and advocacy provided by an Office of the People's Counsel. We strongly urge you to support this request

2. Zero Waste Management

The Climate Coalition supports the increase in the Solid Waste Service Charge in order to invest in various County's Zero Waste initiatives. However, we are concerned about the delay

in implementing the approved initiatives, and the unexpected operating expense of \$35.5M 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.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Karl Held, on behalf of the Climate Coalition Montgomery County

Climate Coalition MoCo Member Organizations

- 350 Montgomery County
- ACQ Climate (Ask the Climate Question)
- Bethesda Green
- Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
- Chesapeake Climate Action Network
- Ecosystems Study Group
- Elders Climate Action
- Environmental Justice Ministry Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church
- Friends of Sligo Creek
- Green Sanctuary Committee of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Silver Spring
- Montgomery Countryside Alliance
- Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
- One Montgomery Green
- Poolesville Green
- Safe Healthy Playing Fields
- Sugarloaf Citizens' Association
- Transit Alternatives to Mid-County Highway Extended/M-83 (TAME)
- The Climate Mobilization Montgomery County
- Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee (TPMEC)
- Zero Waste Montgomery County