

Testimony for Special Appropriation to the FY26 Operating Budget,
Montgomery County Government: Office of Food Systems Resilience,
Resident and Community Gardening Grant Program, \$100,000

Hello, I am Jim Epstein, President of Glenmont Forest Neighbors Civic Association (GFNCA), and we enthusiastically endorse and support this special appropriation.

GFNCA has developed the Serenity Community Gardens and Urban Farm as part of the neighborhood amenities located at the Glenmont Forest Community Park at the corner of Georgia and Randolph roads. We are honored that many of you on the dais have attended the park during our annual block party and other events. This is truly a ground-up, community-initiated project that is now entering our third (3rd) year of production which was initially suggested by our local Spanish-speaking resident members of the Grandview Opportunity Circle. The gardens are an all-volunteer endeavor providing a solution to food security and community cohesion for our neighbors and surrounding area. We strive to implement a cooperative farming model.

Over the past few years we have received minor financial and organizational support from Impact Silver Spring, One Montgomery Green, Pepco, Rock Creek Conservancy, HarvestShare and the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection. In addition to invigorating a previously inert construction site into a flourishing green space, our garden stewards have also focused on safety and accessibility. These efforts include ongoing litter removal, establishing new pathways from Grandview Avenue and the removal of invasive plants in the adjacent forest area which are replaced by native plants and seedlings donated by the Sanctuary, an urban farm in Kensington. We have partnered with students from Wheaton High School, RCC and OMG for workdays to instill the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain this safe and beneficial environment. Future plans include a farmers' market and expanded growing plots.

Currently, GFNCA is approved for a grant award from the Maryland State Department of Agriculture as part of their Water and Power Infrastructure program. This grant allows for ongoing permanent, reliable, secure and economical access to a water supply, originating from the adjacent Fire Station #18. This grant process is supported by the Department of General Services (the “landowner/manager”), WSSC and MoCo Fire and Rescue Services. DEP generously supplied a 1500 gallon cistern for the gardens but are no longer able to support it and are seeking to remove it from the gardens area this Spring, leaving no reliable water source. However, the State grant only provides 87.5% funding for the completed project. Thus, the ability to apply for a grant from OFSR’s Community Gardens grant program is essential to the viability and sustainability of the Serenity Gardens project.

As you are aware, all-volunteer organizations such as GFNCA are dependent upon the generosity and support of government and corporations for these impactful projects. It was unfortunate that the OFSR Community Gardens grant program was paused due to overall county budget pressures but we are hopeful that this special appropriation will help to reestablish the County’s priorities in assisting this small effort to alleviate food security issues in our community. Certainly, OFSR has provided large program support to help offset this issue and we hope that this (relatively) small grant program will help all-volunteer organizations such as GFNCA contribute to the overall health and well-being of our residents and neighbors.

Thank you again for the opportunity to enthusiastically support this supplemental appropriation resolution.