



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ANDREW FRIEDSON
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 1

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COUNCILMEMBER ANDREW FRIEDSON STATEMENT ON FISCAL YEAR 23 BUDGET

COVID-19 shined a light on so many challenges in our community, exposing how many of our neighbors throughout the County are one paycheck away from missing a meal or being unable to access needed services and health care. But it also showed us how we can adapt, change, and partner beyond government to provide residents with the services and supports they need to not only survive but thrive. This budget helps us build a stronger foundation for future success and prosperity based on what we learned these past two years.

I am pleased to report that funding the Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget required no new taxes, recognizing that many of our residents are still struggling to make ends meet. When the County Executive recommended an unprecedented \$20 million withdrawal from the County retiree health benefits trust to fund current obligations, the Council stepped up to unanimously reject it. Reaffirming our commitment to our retirees and sound fiscal management was among my top priorities for this budget, and I was proud to help lead this effort along with Council President Albornoz and Government and Operations Committee Chair Navarro.

That major commitment, however, didn't prevent us from also fulfilling our promise to tackle our housing and climate crises. In fact, we doubled down on our efforts with historic investments to provide record dollars to support our declarations. In response to our critical affordable housing needs, I was pleased to work with Councilmember Riemer to double our investment in the nationally acclaimed, revolving Housing Production Fund (HPF) to reach \$100 million and help us build almost 6,000 new affordable units over the next two decades. The County Council also approved one-time funding of \$40 million to support acquisition and preservation of at-risk naturally occurring affordable housing and added \$6 million to the recently created Housing Opportunity Fund so our nonprofit affordable housing providers can continue their work despite labor shortages, rising interest rates, and dramatically higher construction costs. I was also very pleased to work with Councilmembers Jawando and Riemer on the Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee to continue our efforts to support first-time homebuyers by adding an additional \$1 million in funding again this year.

Thanks to the passage of the Montgomery County Green Buildings Now Act that Councilmember Hucker and I sponsored, this budget includes \$18.6 million for the Montgomery County Green Bank, which will be leveraged with substantial private dollars to help businesses and residents retrofit their buildings to be more energy efficient. We must not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions; we must also increase our environmental resiliency for the damage already done. I have been pushing for several years to double the funding for storm drain retrofit projects to address severe flooding in our neighborhoods. This budget as proposed by the

Executive and supported by the Council now fulfills an urgent need for our environment, our public safety, and our quality of life. As part of other quality of life measures, this budget also includes over \$4 million to maintain and expand our tree canopy and restores \$1 million to patch and resurface roads.

The health of our local economy is always on my mind, especially as we rise to the challenge of recovering from the pandemic. This year's budget includes increased funding for the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, which is tasked with attracting and retaining employers to the county. I am particularly pleased about the direct assistance for disproportionately impacted Black-owned businesses, additional support for Visit Montgomery to support our hard-hit hospitality and tourism sector, and the inclusion of Business Development District Grants to promote placemaking and marketing efforts in some of our county's existing and emerging commercial areas like North Bethesda and Friendship Heights.

This capital budget includes critical transportation funding to advance the build-out of our bus rapid transit network, including on Rockville Pike and the North Bethesda Transitway near the 270-spur. Despite the County Executive's decision to delay the replacement of the Capital Crescent Trail Tunnel, we fought hard to make room for this \$55 million project amidst a long list of priority capital projects and we were able to stave off two and a half years from the County Executive's proposed delays. We also moved the needle on the Tuckerman Lane Sidewalk and Bikeway project, and made room for Summit Avenue Extended, a longstanding Town of Kensington transportation priority which will provide relief to traffic-burdened Connecticut Avenue. This budget also restores significant cuts to our parks and trails and includes critical funding for the exciting new park at the Women's Farm Market in Bethesda, which will bring to fruition a top priority of the 2018 Bethesda Downtown Plan.

Our non-profit partners are the extra layers of mesh in our social safety net that prevent vulnerable residents from falling through the cracks. I am so pleased this budget provides a well-deserved eight percent inflationary adjustment help them meet increased economic needs and service demands. The Nourishing Bethesda effort, which I have been proud to support from its inception, is one example of a partnership between faith, nonprofit, business, and community leaders that feeds hundreds of families each Friday. This budget provides \$250,000 for Nourishing Bethesda to expand their food assistance model and include wraparound services. I am also grateful to colleagues on the Health and Human Services Committee for supporting my request to add \$132,000 to Community FarmShare in this budget to provide weekly, fresh produce bags from local farms to the homes of 200 families in need in collaboration with Linkages to Learning and Montgomery County Public Schools Community Schools. Similarly, I am particularly pleased that we were able to add \$50,000 to help Nonprofit Village with their capacity building and support for local community-based organizations and \$100,000 to support A Wider Circle's critical efforts to help residents return to the workforce.

This budget recognizes the value of investing in our young people by inspiring them, fostering their interests, and equipping them with knowledge and life skills by fully funding the Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College programmatic requests and providing unprecedented investments in our student's mental health and wellbeing including \$5.5 million to dramatically expand high school wellness centers led by Councilmember Navarro. After many years of starts and stops, the Noyes Library for Young Children Rehabilitation and Renovation project is finally fully funded, and thanks to our state partners and a significant county commitment, construction is scheduled to begin this fiscal year. Colleagues and I were able to provide \$1.8 million for KID Museum to provide experiential, hands-on learning, and scientific discovery at the new flagship site at Bethesda Metro through their extraordinary partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools.

The Council continues to work towards greater police accountability while simultaneously ensuring our first responders have the resources, they need to keep our communities safe. While there is more work to be done to address recruitment and retention challenges in public safety, I am pleased that we raised police pay to be more competitive regionally, took steps to address ongoing fairness issues within the pay scale, and thanks to Council Vice President Glass' proposal, expanded the cadet program. I am also pleased that this budget includes \$800,000 in nonprofit security grants for organizations at high risk of experiencing hate crimes. This builds on the successful initiative I worked with the Executive Branch to spearhead last year by adding an additional \$100,000 more in funding to protect vulnerable facilities and the residents who occupy them. Finally, I am very pleased that the Public Safety Committee and this Council responded to my request to finally support the Bethesda Chevy Chase Rescue Squad's calls to have equitable access to the Central Maintenance Facility like every other squad across the County, so they can continue to provide critical emergency services to our residents.

This budget meets our current moment and it helps us build a strong foundation to meet the moments that follow. Thank you to all the Montgomery Citizens who testified – in multiple languages, at home, in person. You made the process better and the final budget we are set to approve – and the County it must support – will be stronger as a result.