OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

MEMORANDUM

November 15, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

Re: Supplemental Appropriation: Tree Replacement #22-29

I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #22-29 is unlikely—as currently proposed—to advance racial equity and social justice in the County as key details about where tree replacement is planned and the process leading to decisions are unclear. To determine whether tree replacement is likely to advance racial equity and social justice, additional details like those provided by the Tree Equity Score are needed.

II. **BACKGROUND:** Supplemental Appropriation # 22-29 in the amount of $193,498 will fund the replacement of roadside trees, in the right-of-way of public roads in the County, using the Street Tree Planting Fund. Available information about the supplemental does not indicate which rights-of-way are likely to receive tree replacements or how those decisions are made.

Multiple disciplines have concluded that urban tree cover produces many benefits to the environment and communities, but inequalities in the distribution of urban tree cover prevents those benefits from being equitably shared. As with other indicators of well-being, structural inequities produce racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes. American Forest, the creator of the Tree Equity Score, explains "with few exceptions, trees are sparse in socioeconomically disadvantaged and neighborhoods of color and more

prominent in wealthier, whiter neighborhoods. Redlining policies, dating back to the 1930s, helped lay the groundwork for this inequity."[1]

In the case of tree replacement, it's important to note that in a 2021 study conducted by researchers from the Nature Conservancy, the relationship between tree coverage in urban areas and factors like income and race/ethnicity was statistically significant[2]. In fact, the study concluded that the strongest predictor of the difference in tree cover between high- and low-income blocks was income inequality, noting that urbanized areas with greater income inequality had greater differences in tree cover between high- and low-income blocks[3]. The Tree Equity Score[4] is a tool to help policymakers understand and address areas of inequitable tree coverage in their community. The tool applies measures of tree canopy cover need and priority for trees in urban neighborhoods (defined as Census Block Groups). The variables the tool reflects are tree canopy cover, climate, demographic and socioeconomic data[5]. Scores range from 0 to 100, with lower scores indicating a greater priority for closing the tree canopy gap. A score of 100 means that a neighborhood has achieved Tree Equity. Below are the tool results for Montgomery County. The darker orange color indicates a tree canopy gap and a higher prioritization for action based on existing tree canopy, population density, income, employment, surface temperature, race, age, and health.

[1] https://www.americanforests.org/tools-research-reports-and-guides/tree-equity-score/
[2] McDonald RI, Biswas T, Sachar C, Housman I, Boucher TM, et al. (2021) The tree cover and temperature disparity in US urbanized areas: Quantifying the association with income across 5,723 communities. PLOS ONE 16(4): e0249715. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249715
[3] McDonald RI, Biswas T, Sachar C, Housman I, Boucher TM, et al. (2021).
[4] https://treeequityscore.org/
[5] https://treeequityscore.org/methodology/

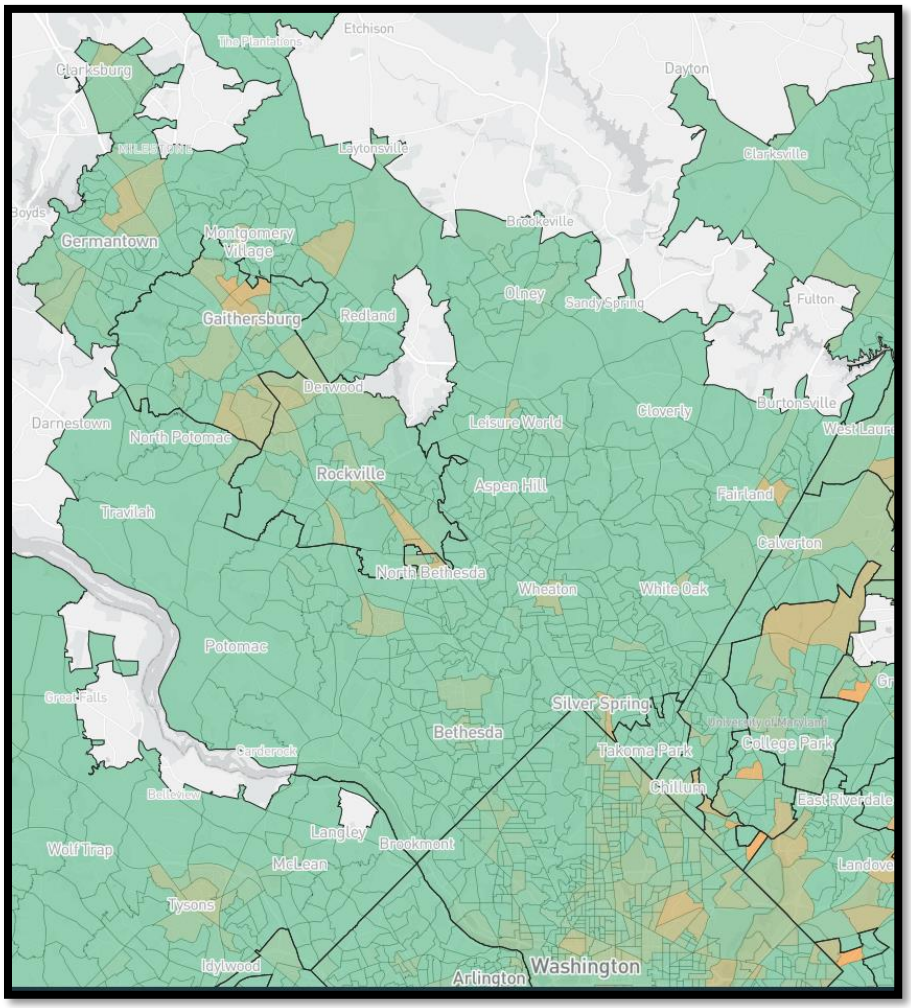

Image 1. Map of Montgomery County and surrounding jurisdictions Tree Equity rankings.

For example, A closer look at the East County area, shows block groups in the Fairland neighborhood with the lowest tree equity score, ranking 495th of 495 of blockgroups[6] covered on this map of Montgomery County.

[6] https://www.treeequityscore.org/map/#12.92/39.07713/-76.94774

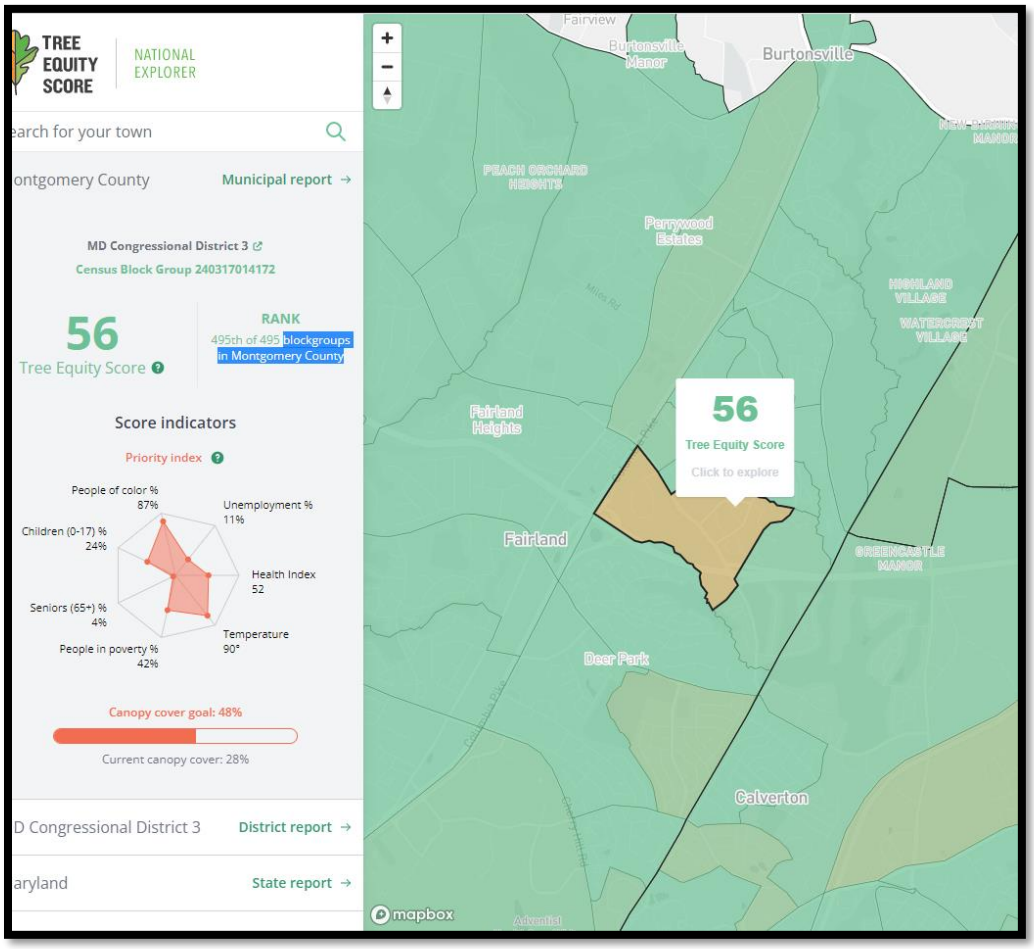

Image 2. Map of Fairland Springs Neighborhood and details about indicators related to the Tree Equity Score of 56.

Applying a racial equity lens to this supplemental appropriation requires information about the neighborhoods in which tree replacement will take place—demographic and income characteristics—and other indicators that might reveal the extent to which climate change has or is likely to impact the community. A tool like the Tree Equity score could help decisionmakers understand the intersection of these variables and tree coverage. Ideally, there would also be information about the process used to determine where tree replacements will take place, including the factors that are considered and how community outreach is conducted. The absence of this information makes it difficult to determine how this supplemental appropriation will affect communities of color and those disproportionately burdened by the effects of climate change.

cc: Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnership, Office of the County Executive