



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

January 31, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

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

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-70
FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for the Public Safety Communications
Center Phase II

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental #23-70—Amendment to the *FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for the Public Safety Communications Center Phase II*—is unlikely to reduce racial disparities and inequities related to emergency preparedness or public safety. However, building upgrades described in the supplemental appropriation could help prevent disparities from widening by ensuring the continuity of services during power outages or other utility disruptions.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #23-70—Amendment to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for the Public Safety Communications Center Phase II (PSCC Phase II)—is to fund the renovation and upgrade of electrical distribution and HVAC systems at the Public Safety Communications Center on Quince Orchard Boulevard. To award the construction contract for phase II, additional funding is requested in response to inflation, supply chain challenges, and equipment cost increases.

There are several methods¹ for assessing the extent to which Capital Improvements Programs (CIP) advance racial equity and social justice. In Montgomery County, the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORES) developed a CIP Budget Equity Tool (BET) and Guidance Manual to help stakeholders incorporate a racial equity lens into

¹ See Examples section

project development and resource decisions. Best practices for using a racial equity tool, such as the CIP BET, suggest that the tool should be used early and often in project development and involve a diverse set of project stakeholders, including community members.

The PSCC Phase II project was developed and approved prior to FY22, and in our review of FY23-28 CIP budget submissions, the BET response indicated “no, this project does not consider potential racial equity impacts”; the response did not offer an additional explanation. In addition, this supplemental appropriation request does not propose substantive changes to the project. Taken together, it is unlikely a racial equity lens was used in assessing project need or impact; and because this supplemental appropriation focuses on funding an existing project there are—in this context—limited opportunities to identify project changes that may support the reduction of racial disparities and inequities. Within the scope of this REIA, opportunities for using the CIP BET to assess and address concerns related to the project’s racial equity impacts are limited. However, using ORESJ’s CIP BET as a framework, we offer several observations for consideration:

What racial disparities or inequities in Montgomery County does this project seek to reduce or eliminate?

This project does not target a specific racial disparity or inequity in the County, instead, it helps build the emergency response infrastructure to ensure mission-critical operations are reliably maintained. While all County residents use the services that are coordinated from within the PSCC, not all residents face equal risks to certain types of emergencies², nor are all residents equally situated in terms of the resources and opportunities to deal with and recover from emergencies. This means that while the PSCC provides a universal benefit, it is the delivery of emergency services (and targeted emergency prevention interventions) coordinated in part through the PSCC that has the potential to reduce racial disparities in emergency risk and outcomes.

In considering projects that involve upgrades to county facilities, it’s important to consider the health and safety of employees who work in those buildings and the demographics of those workers. At the time of this analysis, details about the workforce in the PSCC were not available. However, if the workers are disproportionately people of color (or other groups facing disproportionate health inequities), then upgrades to the building may—on a relatively small scale—help improve the well-being of workers most burdened by systemic health inequities.

² See the following ORESJ REIAs which address racial inequities in climate-related emergency response <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/CBG850.pdf>; fire risk <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-69.pdf>; and health emergencies <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-87.pdf>

How does this project address the racial disparities and inequities you described?

The project will enable upgrades to the building's HVAC and electrical systems, which will help ensure the continuity of services coordinated through the PSCC. Ensuring the safety and full functionality of this building (even during power outages or other emergencies), does not necessarily reduce racial disparities in emergency risk or response, but it is likely to prevent disparities from growing. Additional policy and programmatic interventions are necessary to address racial disparities and inequities in areas of emergency response and health and safety outcomes.

Does this project (including its development, construction, or implementation) have the potential to create any unintended consequences?

During construction, steps should be taken to avoid hazards and disruptions in and around the building. While many of these mitigation practices are standardized through OSHA and other regulatory bodies, ensuring that all on and around the property can equitably access information is critical to ensuring equitable treatment and experience throughout the project. This means ensuring signage is accessible for non-native English speakers and that walking paths around the building are kept clear of obstacles that may impede people with disabilities.

Examples of CIP Analysis with a Racial Equity Lens

As referenced in the Background section, there are several ways of advancing racial equity and social justice in the prioritization, selection, maintenance, and allocation of resources in Capital Improvements Programs. In our research, these two methodologies stand out as models for the County to consider in the development and maintenance of its own CIP.

- The Baltimore, Maryland Department of Planning established a methodology³ for assessing the influence of various kinds of CIP investments in neighborhoods and tracking investments across different measures of equity over time. In June 2022, the department produced an update on its FY23 CIP. The report, including technical notes, is available here:

<https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/FY23%20CIP%20Equity%20Analysis%20Annual%20Update.pdf>.

- The Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board developed a criteria-based system to guide the rehabilitation and capital improvement program of neighborhood parks. The approach incorporates community characteristics and park characteristics to determine the prioritization and selection of CIP projects. An overview of the approach is

³ The Montgomery County, MD Office of Legislative Oversight also referenced the strength of this methodology in the Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement of Expedited Bill 19-22 Bond Authorization:
<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2022/Bille19-22.pdf>

available here: https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/asset/zvw35c/Equity-Based-Criteria-for-Neighborhood-CIP_050416-highlight.pdf

cc: Dr. James Bridgers, Acting Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive