



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

January 24, 2024

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 #24-19
Roadside Tree Protection

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that *Supplemental Appropriation #24-19 Roadside Tree Protection* is likely to advance racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County, though given the proposed resource allocation, the impact may be minimal. Based on available information, the processes used to prioritize tree replacement consider historical and current racial inequities in the distribution of environmental benefits—like trees. Over time, this prioritization process could support the reduction of tree equity gaps in the County.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of supplemental appropriation #24-19 Roadside Trees Protection is to authorize the expenditure of street tree planting revenues (\$132,500) received in FY23 that were greater than budgeted. The funds will be used to replace roadside trees as required by Bill 41-12—Streets and Roads—Roadside Protection. The Street Tree Planting Fund revenues can only be used to plant trees in the right-of-way of a public road in the County.

The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) conducted a Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) of Supplemental Appropriation # 23-18 Street Tree Planting fund in November 2022¹. In that REIA, ORESJ referenced REIA 22-29 (regarding the intersection of racial equity and the benefits of tree coverage) and concluded, based on available information, that:

¹ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-18.pdf>

“Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-18 Street Tree Planting Fund is unlikely—as currently proposed—to advance racial equity and social justice in the County...as there is little to no information provided about where tree placement is planned, compared to need, and whether the processes related to the fund ensure equitable access”.

Since that REIA, ORESJ has received additional information about the *performance* of the Street Tree Planting Fund and *processes* related to site selection. This information responded to some of the questions ORESJ raised in its REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #23-18. In particular, about where tree placement has taken place, relevant census tract demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of those locations, and how historical and current racial inequities in the distribution of environmental benefits—like trees—play into current prioritization and selection processes. Information that accompanied Supplemental Appropriation #24-19 demonstrated the following:

Performance

In FY23, MCDOT’s Tree Maintenance Section planted 2308 new trees within the County Right of Ways. Based on MCDOT’s analysis, 1147 (50%) of these trees were planted within the boundaries of one of the following designated areas: Equity Focus Areas, Low-income/high unemployment/historically redlined census tracts, and equity emphasis areas. Equity Focus Areas and Equity Emphasis Areas are geographic designations that use varying methodologies that don’t necessarily capture or fully reflect where Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and low-income residents experience the most significant gaps in access to the benefits of trees. In addition, it’s unclear whether this 50% of planted trees is proportionate to need or whether tree replacement demands in areas with higher concentrations of BIPOC or low-income residents is greater than the percentage of trees planted. Overall, it is a strength that MCDOT is tracking and mapping tree replacement. In the future, it would be helpful to gain a better sense of tree replacement demand to understand whether gaps persist (particularly those that can’t be filled by other tree planting programs).

Process

MCDOT indicated that this supplemental appropriation funding would help its Tree Maintenance Section proactively (i.e., not in response to a 311 street tree planting service request) schedule replacement tree plantings in areas of the county where 311 street tree planting requests have not kept pace with the rate of street tree removals. MCDOT indicated that it prioritizes the proactive replacement of trees in regions that meet one of the following criteria: low Income/high unemployment; high % minority population; historically redlined. Compared to Supplemental Appropriation #23-18, this prioritization process has a stronger likelihood of reducing tree equity gaps in the County.

Overall, Supplemental Appropriation #24-19—based on the prioritization criteria described—is likely to help reduce racial disparities and other inequities in access to the benefits of tree replacement. Continued monitoring of available resources, tree equity scores, and needs will help shine a light on areas of strength or opportunity in Street Tree Planting/Roadside Tree Protection processes or outcomes.

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation #24-19 Roadside Tree
Protection

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cc: Christopher Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive