



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director

MEMORANDUM

May 14, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

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

Re: Supplemental Appropriation: River Falls Drainage Assessment Project 14-21- 2819 CBG 8501

- I. **FINDINGS:** The Office of Racial Equity finds that this appropriation maintains current racial inequities. River Falls neighborhood is not a strong comparison to other parts of the County with higher levels of climate risk vulnerability. This project has limited ability to act as a model for denser neighborhoods where people of color are more likely to live.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Supplemental Appropriation 14-21-2819 CBG 8501 seeks to commission Maryland Department of Natural Resources to study precipitation-induced flooding hazards in the River Falls neighborhood and identify potential solutions that address existing flood hazards related to the River Falls North and South storm drain systems. The analysis will also consider how the impacts of climate change may exacerbate those hazards. The primary goal of the project is to reduce flooding in the River Falls neighborhood and will involve a hydrologic study to determine current and future system capacities and a neighborhood-wide assessment to determine the most cost-effective and environmentally sound methods to convey additional water and reduce amount of run off reaching the storm drain systems. The scope also indicates that the project will be a model for similar adaptations in other parts of the county.

As instances and severity of damaging-weather events, like floods, increase due to climate change, jurisdictions across the country are seeking ways to build resiliency and preparedness into their water management systems. The US Water Alliance names additional factors related that present risks to communities of color and low-income communities. These factors include aging water infrastructure-- unable to handle precipitation-induced flooding and the damage it may cause to drainage and water treatment systems--, rates of poverty, language barriers, access to technology, and reduced mobility.

The Montgomery County Climate Action Plan explains “Households in more densely populated areas of the County are typically connected to public centralized water and sewerage systems (e.g., in the down county region adjacent to the I-495 portion of the Capital Beltway and along the major transportation corridors in the Upcounty area), while households in more rural settings are more likely to have private, on-site water systems.”¹ These differences in water source, depending on location, effect the kinds of impacts felt by storm water and drainage system issues.

III. **ANALYSIS OF DATA:** Available data for the census tract (706008) within which the River Falls neighborhood is situated, suggests that compared to the county overall, BIPOC are underrepresented among the beneficiaries of the drainage assessment, noting that the percentage of Asian residents is higher in the census tract than in the county overall.

Racial/ethnic group	Census Tract: 706008	Montgomery County
White	61.6%	53.2%
Asian	29.7%	16.7%
Black	5.4%	19.8%
Latino	3.1%	19.1%
Other	3.4%	10.2%

Source: American Community Survey, 2017 (reviewed here: https://montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/OLO2019-7-6_20_19.pdf) and 2010 US Census (reviewed here: [Census Tracts | Open Data Portal \(montgomerycountymd.gov\)](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/OpenData/Tracts/706008))
On other characteristics related to climate change vulnerability, such as age and household income, residents in this census tract are older and have higher median incomes than the county overall.

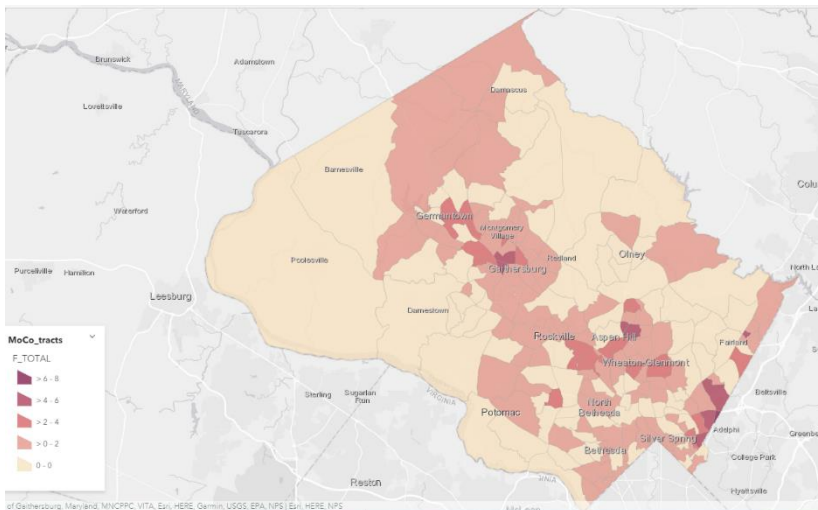
Variable	Census tract: 706008	Montgomery County
Median age	48.3	39.7
Median household income	\$200,000 +	\$110,389
Percent of households with incomes greater than \$200,000	59.9%	24%

Sources: Census tract data source: 2019: ACS 5-yr estimate Subject Tables and Montgomery County data source: 2019: ACS 1-yr estimate: [Montgomery County, MD - Profile data - Census Reporter](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/OpenData/Tracts/706008)

¹ [Montgomery County Climate Action Plan \(montgomerycountymd.gov\)](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/OpenData/Tracts/706008) pg. 24

Using DEP's SVI tool, census tract **706008** is indexed at a low level of social vulnerability to climate change risks. See **Centering Racial Equity and Social Justice** Montgomery County Climate Action Plan Map: [Centering Racial Equity and Social Justice \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

Analysis of this data suggests that, based on the racial equity and social justice considerations used to understand a community's vulnerability to climate change risks, the River Falls neighborhood is not a strong comparison to other parts of the County with higher levels of climate risk vulnerability. Therefore, the findings of the River Falls assessment, could have limited applicability to other areas of the County when factors such as density, race/ethnicity, age, and household income are taken into consideration.



cc: Dale Tibbitts, Council Liaison, Office of the County Executive
Chris Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation