



Montgomery County Group

February 11, 2019

Dear County Executive Elrich:

On behalf of Sierra Club Montgomery County, we are writing to urge that the proposed FY2021 Operating Budget includes adequate resources to immediately and aggressively begin implementing the climate protection plan, which is to be finalized in early 2021, mid-way through FY 2021.

Many climate plans – though reflecting heavy investments by staff, consultants and volunteers, as in our own plan-in-progress – have an unhappy fate, ending up on a bookshelf, gathering dust or as a guide for a limited program here or there.

For the Montgomery County climate plan to truly be a success – to achieve a dramatic reduction in the county’s carbon footprint - will require the fiscal resources necessary for its timely and effective implementation.

It will be tempting to ignore this inconvenient truth by simply piling new responsibilities on current staff. This must be avoided. Staff doing climate work now are already overburdened.

The full magnitude of resources needed to carry out the plan will await its completion. But, even at this time, it is clear that the FY2021 Operating Budget must provide a **major increase in fiscal resources over FY2020** to ensure the immediate and meaningful implementation of the plan upon its release.

We don’t need, however, to await the plan’s completion to identify some specific fiscal resources that are needed in the coming fiscal year. The county is wisely not deferring moving forward with some climate initiatives. The Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS) program, to address the approximately one-fourth of emissions due to running commercial buildings, is one such initiative.

We urge that the proposed operating budget include funding for at least two FTEs to develop and implement the BEPS program. Washington, D.C. is also in the process of developing a BEPS program. It has approved seven FTEs to run both benchmarking and BEPS and is creating a new branch to carry out these programs. (By comparison, Montgomery County currently has one staff person to run the benchmarking program and no resources were authorized for BEPS in FY2020.)

In addition, the county will need to create a resource entity to help building managers comply with the new standards. New York City, one of the few other cities with a BEPS-type program, has such a body. DC is in the process of creating one, the HUB. DC is investing \$400,000 this year, the first year of the HUB, and presumably at least comparable amounts in future years. Much conversation about the HUB has recognized the value of making it a regional resource. This would require a fiscal contribution by Montgomery County. **We urge that the proposed budget include some first-year funding to accommodate expansion of HUB activities to Montgomery County.**

Even where we don't know the precise contours of the climate plan, the recommendations of the workgroups allow us to anticipate specific staff that will be required. We want to be clear, however, that we regard the list below as skeletal and that others in government or in the public may identify additional resource needs that should be met as well.

The workgroup categories provide a framework for identifying these needs. Below we lay them out.

Clean Energy – The workgroup covered the expansion of installed clean energy in Montgomery County as well as the opportunities that exist for greening the energy supplied by utilities. There are, however, to our knowledge, no positions in the Energy, Climate, and Compliance Division of DEP focused on these issues. **We urge that the budget include two new FTEs, one directed at the development of Montgomery County-wide clean energy and one with responsibility for monitoring and engaging with the state-wide bodies, e.g., the Public Service Commission and the General Assembly that directly impact the energy supplied by the utilities to residents and businesses in the county.**

Transportation - This committee had four subcommittees, including ones on Transportation Demand Management, Walkable/bikeable communities and EVs. We can identify at least one area where, to our knowledge, there is no current staffing and which is critical to an effective transportation response to the climate, the expansion of EVs. **We urge the addition of one new FTE to expand community-wide replacement of internal combustion engine vehicles with EVs, including ensuring an adequate EV charger network.**

Buildings – This workgroup offered more than 50 recommendations, some of which related to the BEPS program that is currently being developed. Several of them relate to residential buildings, the more than 250,000 single family homes/townhouses, as well as additional multifamily buildings that contribute about one-fourth of greenhouse gas emissions in the county. Currently, there is only one staff person assigned to the entire county to address residential carbon emissions. **We urge at least one new FTE to expand the scope of the residential energy efficiency program.**

Public Engagement and Education – This workgroup had at least four subcommittees, just one of which offered more than 60 recommended actions. Another presented more than 35 recommendations. Currently, the Energy, Climate, and Compliance Division in DEP includes, to our knowledge, no staff assigned to engage the broader community on climate. **We urge at least one new FTE to be added to begin implementing key recommendations.**

Adaptation/Sequestration – This workgroup was charged with developing recommendations to reduce the county’s vulnerability to climate change. To our knowledge, key aspects of an adaptation/sequestration program are not adequately staffed at present, including planting native trees, expanding the Rainscapes program and supporting the expansion of the backyard composting program. **We urge at least two new FTEs be added to help effectively implement these programs.**

In addition, the Zero Waste Task Force, a body comparable to the Technical Workgroups, has favorably reviewed a "Pay-As-You-Throw" waste collection program as a substitute for a tax-based waste collection system, to help achieve zero waste. **We urge funding for a pilot program to allow evaluation of this promising program.**

Finally, though we understand the plan is scheduled to be completed by early FY2021, there will be ongoing needs for modeling new scenarios after the plan’s release. **We therefore urge reasonable funding for the consultant to respond to additional requests, as new information comes to light and situations change.**

In conclusion, to ensure demonstrable progress in addressing the climate crisis, the operating budget should substantially expand funding to begin plan implementation and should specifically include funding for the nine positions and other initiatives that can be anticipated and that are laid out above.

We urge you to ensure that the proposed operating budget that is delivered to the Council demonstrates a full commitment to the climate goals embodied in the 2017 county climate emergency resolution and to the needs of our county’s residents to avoid an unstable and devastating climate.

Sincerely,

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