



Items of Interest from the FY12 Budget Approved by the County Council

Excerpted from Montgomery County websites, Council Reports and Forest Conservation Advisory Committee Discussions

In another brutal county budget year, the Montgomery County Council made a valiant attempt to listen to constituents who weighed on a number of issues critical to a healthy environment and quality of life in our communities. The FY12 budget approved by the Council on May 26th is not a budget that will make everyone happy, as several Council members have acknowledged. However, our elected officials were not onboard with the Executive's proposed across-the-board cuts. They are to be applauded for their attempt to be equitable and to look for ways to restore funding to essential County services.

Parks and Planning



After a controversial proposal in the Executive's FY12 budget for more drastic cuts to the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), the Council voted to restore \$1.58 million to the Planning budget which will allow the M-NCPPC to fill 8 vacant positions and move forward with an analysis of a new county-wide rapid transit system. County land use planners need the positions and funding to continue work on master plans and other projects such as a new urban tree planting initiative and the new urban tree stewards effort in local parks. Funding cut from the FY11 budget to the county park system was also restored. The Council restored park maintenance services that would have been eliminated under the Executive's proposal.

Save the trees, please

About \$2 million in county street tree maintenance funding will be restored to the FY12 operating budget approved by the Council. The county has approximately 425,000 trees in the right-of-way, excluding trees located along agricultural reserve and rustic roads. Street tree maintenance is performed by the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Division of Highway Services under a permit granted by the Maryland State Forester's Office. Under the Maryland Roadside Tree Law, all trees growing on a publicly maintained right of way are considered part of the State Forest and are maintained by the local government agency. All activities, such as pruning, removal, insect and disease control, planting, root cutting, etc., are completed by the Tree Maintenance Section of the Division of Highway Services. The division plants approximately 1,800 trees per year to replace trees that have been removed from the public right-of-way. Trees are replaced by the County on a request basis. The street program had been gutted during the past two budget cycles, resulting in no ability to replant trees lost to storm damage, age and disease.



In a May 15th meeting of the County Forest Conservation Advisory Committee DOT arborist and urban forester Brett Linkletter was asked about the impact of cuts in the FY10 and FY11 budgets. He noted a backlog of services that had been the unintended consequences of budget constraints. As of May 1st, the backlog of services for street trees included:

- 1,750 street trees in poor condition that present a hazard to public safety due to old age, disease and storm damage
- Almost 3,000 street trees that have not been replanted due to budget cuts to the program

- About 1,400 street trees in need of pruning so that the trees are better maintained and have more years of life in them
- 3,300 tree stumps due for removal
- A 7-month backlog of new inspections of trees in the right of way

“With every storm, the situation gets worse because with two inspectors, it’s tough to keep up with the maintenance needed for right-of-way trees,” said Linkletter. “There is a need for maintenance of trees as an upfront issue. The backend approach becomes a matter of losing trees that we’ve been unable to maintain. When trees aren’t maintained properly, that’s when we lose them. It’s much better to perform maintenance when it’s needed and hold onto healthier canopy trees as long as possible.”

Water quality

The Council voted along with Prince George’s County Council to increase water and sewer charges for the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission by 8.5 percent to provide sufficient resources for WSSC to continue a number of important efforts, including an aggressive large diameter water main inspection, repair and acoustic fiber optic monitoring program. The budget provides full funding for WSSC’s FY12 operating budget and full funding for WSSC’s FY12-17 Capital Improvements Program.



Solid waste charges with minimal to no increases for residential customers were also part of the Council’s approved budget along with an increase in the annual Water Quality Protection Charge (from \$49 to \$70.50 per equivalent residential unit). This funding will be used for:

- Implementation of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit, consistent with a draft plan submitted by the County to the State of Maryland earlier this year.
- Transfer of the Department of Transportation’s stormwater maintenance costs (\$2.05 million and 30 workyears) from the General Fund to the Water Quality Protection Fund as recommended by the Executive.
- Covering (for the first time) \$1.9 million in water quality related work currently being done by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Indoor air quality and over-crowding in schools

Public school students can breathe easy now. The Council approved an additional \$394,000 in FY12 for Indoor Air Quality Improvements (a 23 percent increase over approved funding for FY12). Several new “placeholder” projects totaling \$18.3 million through FY16 will seek to address overcrowding issues (and avoid building moratoria) in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Northwest, Downcounty Consortium and Richard Montgomery cluster.



Historic Preservation

The FY12 budget retained last year’s funding levels (\$254,840 in the non-departmental account) for the Historic Preservation Commission’s responsibilities.

This summary based on County government and Council updates is published on the **Conservation Montgomery** website. For the complete budget summary published on the County Council Website, visit http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Apps/Council/PressRelease/PR_details.asp?PrID=7630