



MCPB Date: 5/8/2025

Agenda Item #8

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 6, 2025

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jason K. Sartori, Planning Director *JS*
Bridget Broullire, Planning Deputy Director

FROM: Karen Warnick, Division Chief, Management Services *Kaw*
Amber Ford, Budget Manager, Management Services *AF*

SUBJECT: FY25 Budget Transfers for the Planning Department

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval of the Request for FY25 Budget Transfers for the Planning Department.

BACKGROUND:

The Land Use Article, Section 18-109, provides for budget transfers as long as the transfer does not exceed 110% of the available approved budget amounts or result in a change in the work program. Accordingly, Commission Practice 3-60, Budget Adjustments (Amendments and Transfers), allows budget transfers when they do not increase the budget by more than 10%, and such transfers are approved by the Planning Board when they exceed \$100,000. The Planning Board has authority to transfer appropriations between the major object codes (personnel, supplies, services, capital outlay) and between divisions if they meet those conditions.

REQUEST APPROVAL OF THE FY25 BUDGET TRANSFERS FOR THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT:

The Planning Department's recommended transfers below **do not exceed 10% in any division and do not change the work program**. The Planning Department estimates it will have personnel savings in FY25 and is requesting to reallocate these savings to better position the department regarding the upcoming FY26 budget year and to continue to meet their commitment to the County residents to provide the best services possible. The Planning Department requests approval to adjust the FY25 divisional line-item budgets as shown below.

DETAILS OF BUDGET TRANSFERS:

The Planning Department is seeking the Board's approval to transfer **\$650,000** from the Personnel Services category to Other Services & Charges, Supplies & Materials, and Capital Outlay:

1. Retail Market Analysis – \$90,000

In 2017, the Planning Department hired a consultant to study the county's retail market and develop strategies for successful retail centers. The findings informed master plan recommendations to ensure appropriate retail placement. Follow-up studies provided guidance on supporting small, diverse businesses in areas like Wheaton and Silver Spring. The pandemic shifted consumer habits towards online shopping and food deliveries, impacting store and restaurant operations. Despite these changes, physical stores and restaurants remain crucial for community amenities, entry-level employment, and entrepreneurship. As *Thrive Montgomery 2050* is implemented, reassessing the retail market's health will help advance economic goals. This study aims to measure the retail sector's status and suggest policies for its growth and adaptation. This funding was requested in the FY26 Proposed Budget and was presented as a budget reduction to the Planning Board and Council to meet the County Executive's budget recommendation.

2. Community Planning Academy Countywide Launch Support – \$60,000

The goal of the Community Planning Academy is to educate residents with the knowledge and tools they need to better understand the planning process, advocate for their communities, and engage more proactively with planning efforts. Staff have been working on creating the Community Planning Academy using FY25 funds to launch the first cohort in Summer 2025. After the summer cohort, Montgomery Planning will need to refine, promote and launch the Community Planning Academy to reach a county-wide audience. Staff will use these funds to work with a consultant to incorporate learner feedback into course improvements; promote and recruit participants county-wide; support in-person sessions to deepen engagement and strengthen connections between community members and Planning staff; maintain ongoing evaluation and refinement of the course; and provide monitoring and progress reporting to showcase the impact of the Academy's county-wide launch.

3. Master Plan Transportation Adequacy Metrics – \$150,000

In December 2020, the County's Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee approved a new approach to measuring transportation adequacy in master plans. Rather than forecasting intersection performance 30 years into the future, the new metrics evaluate job accessibility, travel time, vehicle miles traveled, and bicycle accessibility at the policy area level. Since these metrics were approved, they have been used to evaluate four master plans. However, some stakeholders have questioned whether the metrics are too high-level to inform master plan recommendations. Given that the County Council, Planning Board, County Executive and community members rely on these metrics to determine whether master plans will deliver adequate transportation systems, it is important to reevaluate them from time to time. This funding will be used to evaluate the existing transportation adequacy metrics and consider whether new metrics are needed to inform master plan recommendations that are aligned with *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, including equity, economic development and environmental resilience.

4. Communications Preference Survey – \$90,000

Montgomery Planning consistently seeks to understand the individuals and communities we serve so that we may communicate with and engage them more transparently and equitably. Understanding the needs and interests of our stakeholders is crucial to strengthening relationships, attracting participation, and successfully advocating for community-informed planning recommendations. As part of this effort, we are interested in community members' awareness and perceptions of Montgomery Planning and their attitudes, preferences, and preferred communication and engagement methods related to the work we do. This funding would help conduct a statistically valid county-wide survey that would help us to understand:

- the communications preferences (channels) of residents
- awareness and perceptions from residents of Montgomery Planning and alignment with planning-related priorities
- what cultural and other barriers and motivators exist to participating in and supporting Planning activities
- what steps Planning can take to deliver more inclusive outreach and engagement

The FY25 budget includes \$50,000 for a smaller, targeted survey. This additional \$90,000 would support a county-wide survey.

5. Graduate Assistant – \$28,000

This funding would provide one graduate student enrolled at the University of Maryland in the Urban Studies and Planning Program in the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation to work as a research intern on projects of significant interest and usefulness to the Department. This allows the university to provide its top graduate students with practical research and work experience that is compatible with the students' intellectual and professional interests along with financial support. Planning's budget has funding for 3 graduate students. This would add funding for an additional graduate student.

6. One Vehicle – \$39,000

The Planning Department is requesting to replace a vehicle that was purchased in 2013 and has exceeded its life cycle replacement span.

7. Translation Services – \$50,000

The Planning Department's need for translation services for community engagement has dramatically increased as we seek to reach out to and engage the varied underserved and underheard populations in the county. This \$50,000 would augment our funding for services including translation for public meetings, graphic design, video and master plan materials.

8. Postage – \$30,000

As our community engagement increases, so does the demand for mailings and notices. This \$30,000 will augment our funding for Department-wide postage.

9. Audio-Visual (AV) Streaming and ADA Close Captioning – \$113,000

The Planning Department uses a contractual service for AV streaming and closed captioning for all meetings for Planning Board, Full Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Development Review Committee, and special Department and Commission events per Open Meetings Act and ADA requirements. This would cover the cost of this service for the next year.

The Planning Board's approval of this transfer is requested.

Approved by the Planning Board: _____ Date: _____
 Artie L. Harris, Planning Board Chair