

# MontCo must spend \$20m on ADA building improvements

By: [Rachel Baye](#) | 09/20/11 8:05 PM

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Montgomery County will need to spend at least \$20 million to help its buildings and parks meet federal Americans with Disabilities Act standards, officials announced Tuesday.

The Justice Department has given the county six years to make the necessary upgrades to its facilities, meaning that other construction projects -- like school and library renovations -- may have to take a backseat while the county makes its buildings and parks ADA-compliant.

Justice audited 110 county buildings in 2006 as part of a national program called Project Civic Access. Fairfax and Prince George's counties also were audited.

In a settlement last month with the agency, Montgomery agreed to upgrade its buildings, parks and website to make them more accessible to people with disabilities. County officials also agreed to survey an additional 479 buildings that Justice officials did not audit -- 244 county buildings and 235 school facilities used by county programs -- and to improve those facilities as needed.

Changes include small items, like adjusting doorknobs and bathroom railings, to large-scale renovations.

Upgrades to the first 110 buildings would cost about \$20 million, Montgomery County Department of General Services Director David Dise estimated, which will be spread over six years.

By comparison, Fairfax County is spending about \$13 million over three years to meet ADA standards, said spokesman Jeremy Lasich.

Dise said he won't have an estimate on the last 479 buildings until after they are assessed.

Likewise, Mitra Pedoeem, division chief for park development at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, said she doesn't know how much the upgrades to the county's parks are going to cost.

At a time when the county's purse strings are tight, the lack of a price tag for the required upgrades concerned the council Tuesday.

"We have made a lot of promises to the community," said Council President Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring. She pointed to a list of projects waiting for funding -- school expansions and renovations, libraries, roads, and recreation centers.

"We have all these competing interests now," she said. "We don't know where they're going to go."

To make matters more difficult, County Executive Ike Leggett recently asked the council, Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College, and the Park and Planning Commission to reduce their construction budgets to help the county reduce its bond obligations. In all, the cuts would total about \$150 million over six years.