

12/1/21

President Tom Hucker, Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Hucker and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

The undersigned organizations welcome the recent suite of proposals in Montgomery County to fight climate change and address the county's 2017 climate emergency declaration. The Green Buildings Now Act, the Building Energy Performance Standard, and the ongoing work of the Montgomery County Green Bank are exceptional tools designed to move our county rapidly to a zero-carbon status.

The best way to do this, of course, is to make sure all new and retrofitted energy systems in buildings are powered by electricity, not fossil fuels. However, we are concerned that these initiatives -- unless explicitly modified -- will in fact allow for county loans and grant support for new fossil fuel systems, such as gas-fired hot water and boilers. We believe this is unacceptable. Continuing to develop gas systems is an unhealthy and unwise investment that is incompatible with a serious effort to address climate change.

We therefore propose that the GBNA bill be amended to rule out any County assistance for new or retrofitted energy systems powered by fossil fuels. We also recommend that the Green Bank reorient its practices to only support electric systems. And we urge the County Council to pass pending BEPS legislation, and set subsequent regulations that allow for only new or retrofitted electric energy systems, with few exceptions.

The motto of "Electrify Everything" is now a central strategy of the US and global climate movement. In Montgomery County, we must adopt this strategy immediately, while making sure to protect low- and moderate-income families and businesses with enhanced support to make the transition. Already, right here in Montgomery County, the City of Takoma Park has launched [a new grant program](#) to ONLY support electric systems while prioritizing support for low- and moderate-income applicants. We suggest that Montgomery County adopt this approach in the BEPS, the GBNA, and the Green Bank.

Montgomery County has set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2027 and 100 percent by 2035. To have any chance of reaching that target, all new systems

for hot water, space heating, cooking and other needs must be electric from this moment forward.

This means, in addition to amending the BEPS and GBNA bills, the Green Bank itself should halt all funding for systems that use fossil fuels. These systems, many of which are designed to last for two decades or longer, have no place in a county that is committed to addressing the climate crisis. Moreover, continuing to invest in gas systems will disproportionately harm low and moderate income communities and communities of color who already bear too much of the burden of fossil fuels.

Again, Takoma Park has provided an excellent real-world example for how the county should approach its climate initiatives. Projects covered by the program include electric vehicle charging equipment, solar panels, and heat pumps. The program places specific emphasis on helping those in greatest financial need, ensuring that the electrification transition in the city will not leave vulnerable residents behind.

At this point in our fight against climate change, we simply cannot fund the development of any new fossil fuel-powered systems. We urge the council to ensure the county does not continue to fund these systems, and focuses instead on driving rapid, widespread electrification, with special support for low and moderate income communities. We further encourage the county to follow principles of equity proposed by the Green New Deal (GND) movement when allocating resources for clean energy systems. Besides centering the concerns of BIPOC communities, a GND perspective would require that projects supported with these County funds create good, green jobs by requiring the payment of prevailing wages.

Sincerely,

Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
Environmental Justice Ministry, Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church
350 Montgomery County
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization
Takoma Park Mobilization's Environment Committee
Green Sanctuary Committee of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Silver Spring
Jim Driscoll (individual)