

July 25, 2022

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville Maryland

Testimony on: Comprehensive Building Decarbonization, Bill No. 13-22

Council President Alborno and Members of the Montgomery County Council:

The Montgomery County Group of the Maryland Sierra Club, on behalf of more than 11,000 members and supporters, submits this testimony in support of Bill 13-22, which would require the County Executive to issue regulations by a date certain to establish all-electric building standards applicable to new buildings, and additions and major renovations to existing buildings.

In sum, we unequivocally support the passage of legislation to mandate, in a comprehensive manner, that new construction in Montgomery County be all-electric: new construction should utilize electricity for space heating, service water heating, cooking, clothes washing and drying, and lighting, and should not use fuel gas or fuel oil. We recognize, as this bill does, that careful consideration should be given to the mechanics of shifting to electricity from gas and fuel oil, including the basic timeline and the possibility of including certain limited extensions or exceptions for specific types of buildings.

The basic timeline should require expeditious action. The 2024 implementation date included in this legislation is in accord with the November 2021 recommendation of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change that, statewide, an all-electric construction code be in force “as early as possible but no later than 2024.”¹ Any extensions or exceptions should be based on clear evidence of a demonstrated need, be narrowly drawn, and not significantly detract from the electrification effort. We look forward to further discussions about the mechanics of implementing all-electric building standards when this bill is considered in committee.

The necessity for establishing all-electric building standards for new construction is clear. As noted in the memorandum accompanying the introduction of Bill 13-22 (submitted by County Executive Elrich and Councilmember Riemer), the building sector accounts for about half of our county’s greenhouse gas emissions. The Council acted in May of this year to reduce emissions from existing, already-constructed buildings by enacting Bill 16-21, establishing building energy performance standards. That left new construction unaddressed.

¹ [1] Maryland Commission on Climate Change, “Building Energy Transition Plan,” <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/2021%20Annual%20Report%20Appendices%20FINAL.pdf>, at 19.



As discussed in detail in the state Climate Commission's November 2021 "Building Energy Transition Plan," the way to meaningfully reduce greenhouse emissions in new construction is to rely on electricity, not gas or fuel oil. Methane gas is an extremely potent greenhouse gas, and drilling for gas, transporting gas, and burning gas in our buildings significantly contribute to the rising level of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere.

Electricity is becoming cleaner as efforts increase to rely on wind, solar, and geothermal forms of energy. However, Maryland is still far away from achieving 100 percent clean electricity. In that regard, the Sierra Club continues to strongly support additional action by Montgomery County to effectively allow for, and support, the generation of clean electricity within the County's borders, particularly solar energy.

Constructing all-electric buildings has important benefits in addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The elimination of gas will improve indoor air quality since gas stoves emit toxic chemicals and are associated with significantly increased incidences of asthma among children. All-electric construction also is cost-effective.

In 2017, the County Council adopted an Emergency Climate Mobilization resolution establishing our county's goal of achieving an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2027 and their 100 percent elimination by 2035. Half the allotted time now has passed for achieving the 80 percent reduction. Achieving this reduction requires the County to address the source of half of our greenhouse emissions – our buildings.

We applaud the enactment of building energy performance standards for existing buildings. Now the Council must act to address new construction.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important bill.

Sincerely,

Shruti Bhatnagar, Chair
Sierra Club Montgomery County Group, MD
Shruti.bhatnagar@mdsierra.org
240.498.3459

Mark Posner
ExCom & Energy team member
Sierra Club Montgomery County Group, MD
mark.posner@mdsierr.org