

# Welcome to the Capital Sierran, newsletter of the Sierra Club DC Chapter

November 2021

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Celebrate a Sustainable Solstice at this year's virtual Holiday Party

### Save the Date for our Annual Chapter Holiday Party, Wed. Dec 8

By Susan Schorr, Holiday Party Committee Chair

The holidays are quickly approaching. You are cordially invited to gather for a wonderful evening of fun and fellowship to celebrate our Sierra Club community at the DC Chapter's Annual Holiday Party and Virtual Auction Fundraiser. This year, we'll celebrate with the theme Sustainable Solstice.

Tickets for this year's virtual celebration are available here and at the link below.

Our annual Holiday Party is the DC Chapter's major fundraising event which features tiered ticket prices to support our mutual fundraising and accessibility goals. It also includes the ever-popular silent auction, running December 1-9. (Party attendance is not needed to participate. Watch your emails)! We encourage you to get involved and invite your colleagues, friends, neighbors, and family. All are welcome!

Date: Wednesday, December 8, 2021 Time: Party starts at 6pm ET! Where: Zoom link will be provided for ticket holders Purchase Tickets: <u>http://bit.ly/SCHoliday21</u>

Tickets are available at the following tiers: Candlelight (\$15), Moonlight (\$35), Starlight (\$50) and Sunlight (\$100) -- we invite you to purchase tickets at the level that works for you, and of course, feel free to buy multiple tickets for friends, colleagues, or family!

Have an item or skill to donate to our silent **auction**? Let us know: <u>http://bit.ly/SCHoliday21Auction</u>

Volunteer: Here

### Victory! New Law Requires DC's Utility Regulators to be Qualified

By Lara Levison, Clean Energy Committee Chair

The Sierra Club and our allies won a stunning victory on October 5, when the DC Council passed legislation setting qualifications for individuals nominated to oversee DC's electric and gas utilities. For years, advocates have pushed unsuccessfully for nominees to the DC Public Service Commission (PSC) who would promote clean energy, climate action, and consumer protection. Over the past several years, Mayor Bowser has repeatedly nominated candidates with no relevant experience or vision to implement DC's climate and clean energy commitments. Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie, the chair of the committee responsible for these nominations, supported the mayor's choices.

With the nomination of PSC Chair Willie Phillips to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, likely creating a vacancy on the PSC in the near future, Councilmember Mary Cheh introduced a <u>resolution</u> declaring an emergency need to set qualifications for PSC candidates and a <u>bill</u> requiring that the next nominee have "experience in electric grid modernization and renewable energy integration or technology," and that the subsequent nominee have "experience in consumer protection." By declaring an emergency, the legislation avoided McDuffie's committee but required a supermajority of nine votes out of 13 (rather than seven) to pass the Council.

The Sierra Club, DC Environmental Network, and allies scrambled to round up nine votes to pass the bill, contacting councilmembers with letters, emails, texts, and calls. With consumer advocates pitching in, we achieved a resounding victory. The emergency resolution passed 10 to 3, and the bill setting qualifications passed 11 to 2. Permanent legislation will still be needed, but these votes put Mayor Bowser on notice that the Council and the community want our electric and gas utility regulators to have the vision and knowledge to transform the energy sector in an equitable and just manner to meet the climate crisis.

To learn more about the DC Chapter's Clean Energy Committee, contact committee chair Lara Levison at <u>clean.energy@dc.sierraclub.org</u>.



Partners from Audubon Naturalist Society and Washington Interfaith Network talk with community members as they measure neighborhood gas leaks

## Sierra Club DC and Faith Community team up on Gas Leaks Detection and Organizing for a Greener, Healthier Energy Future

By Barbara Briggs, Beyond Gas subcommittee member

A year ago, in the depths of the pandemic, Sierra Club's Beyond Gas group had an idea: Let's purchase a methane detector so we can check out DC's gas leak problem for ourselves, and educate others about gas leaks, methane's impact on

climate and the health of DC families.

On our very first leak detection foray in February, Quaker Sunday school kids and their teachers found leaks within blocks of Friends Meeting of Washington in Ward 2--including one spot where methane levels exceeded 100% of the Lower Explosive Limit (LEL) of 50,000 parts per million (ppm). Since then, Sierra Club and our partners, Audubon Naturalist Society, Washington Interfaith Network and their congregations have surveyed 15 more neighborhoods across all DC's wards. In a little over 20 hours, we have found over 350 leaks-- including over a dozen in the hazardous range. Some of these leaks have been spewing methane for over ten years.

This project is allowing us to build relationships, a shared understanding of the problem of continued burning of gas in our buildings, and an eagerness to fight for a future energy system that is better for the environment and healthier for DC families.

To get involved with the DC Chapter's Beyond Gas subcommittee, please email <u>beyondgas@dc.sierraclub.org</u>.

## WMATA Metrobus Electrification Campaign

By Andrew Moiseff, Clean Transportation subcommittee chair

This past June, Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) board of directors <u>approved a plan</u> to fully electrify the transit agency's 1,500 bus fleet by 2045. This came after sustained advocacy by the Metro Electric Bus Coalition, a group of 26 organizations that includes the Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists, EarthJustice, and Audubon Naturalist Society.

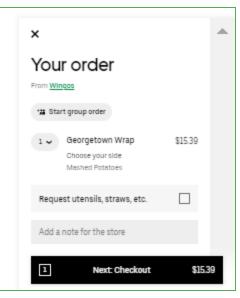
More recently, this same coalition advocated for the US Department of Transportation (DOT) to appoint new federal representatives to the Metro board. In September, the <u>department announced</u> the appointment of three new board members to replace those from the previous administration. DC Mayor Muriel Bowser also appointed a new district representative to the board: District deputy mayor for operations and infrastructure, Lucinda Babers.

While Metro's plan to convert its regional bus fleet to 100 percent electric by 2045 is no doubt a good signal, according to the current plan, less than 20 percent of its fleet will be electric by 2030. Therefore, while the approved plan meets the long-term transportation electrification target in the Clean Energy D.C. Act, it falls well short of the interim target of 50 percent electric by 2030. This backloads electrification, which the Sierra Club and coalition partners see as a significant problem. Several recent opinion pieces ("Metro's inexcusable delay on electric buses" and "DC should lead on clean buses" by coalition partners in the Washington Post and Greater Greater Washington make our position clear - Metro must adjust the plan and electrify sooner.

DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson <u>agrees</u>. Following advocacy by the Metro Electric Bus Coalition, the District council held a <u>public roundtable</u> to, in part, hear from experts on electrification as well as from leaders of other transit agencies that are electrifying their fleets more at a faster pace. This is meant to inform a council resolution that has been introduced, but not yet passed.

Sierra Club will be advocating for the passage of this resolution, and for Maryland and Virginia legislatures to pass similar measures, calling for bus fleets to be at least 50 percent electric by 2030.

To learn more about the DC Chapter's Clean Transportation subcommittee, contact chair Andrew Moiseff at <u>clean.transportation@dc.sierraclub.org</u>.



The Uber Eats platform enables customers to request accessory food service ware like utensils to stop needless waste from automatically being included in takeout orders

# Food Ordering Apps Required to Adopt Plastic and Condiment Opt-In Feature

By Angela Scott and Susan Schorr, Zero Waste committee members

Our Zero Waste Committee (ZWC) members are on a mission to change the business practices of food ordering apps by confirming the customer's ordering experience. Since July 1st, third-party apps have been required to update their default settings so that customers don't automatically receive lots of "stuff" in their takeout orders, but instead affirmatively request, or opt-in, to receive accessory disposable food service ware such as plastic utensils, napkins, and condiments. Apps must also enable customers to request only the specific items they need. Both requirements are part of the 2020 DC Zero Waste Omnibus Amendment Act. Implementation will lead to a significant decrease in the number of unused plastic and other single-use items thrown away every year.

Postmates and UberEats are two third-party food ordering platforms that have already redesigned their app to enable customers to opt-in, according to ZWC research. By doing so, these companies are not only preventing single-use waste from entering landfills but are also helping restaurants save money. DC Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) is expected to follow-up with apps such as Caviar, ChowNow and DoorDash, whose platforms displayed no obvious opt-in feature when ZWC members checked, as well as with Grubhub and Seamless whose platforms pre-checked a request for utensils and napkins -- the exact opposite outcome required by the new Zero Waste law.

Opt-in- provisions will apply to food service entities on January 1, 2022. This includes updating online ordering platforms restaurants operate and when filling other takeout orders, such as those placed over the phone. DOEE is also expected to make small grants available to help food service entities adopt reusable food service ware early next year. The ZWC plans to spread the word about these welcome changes to help restaurants save money and reduce takeout trash. The Committee hopes to attract volunteers to support this outreach.

To get involved with the DC Chapter's Zero Waste Committee, contact <u>zero.waste@dc.sierraclub.org</u>.



Cormorants at Watts Branch. Arboretum to left (west bank)

## Anacostia River Tour recap

#### By Marian Dombroski, Clean Water committee member

In 2018, the Clean Water Committee adopted a section of Watts Branch, a major tributary of the Anacostia River, through the DC Department of Energy and the Environment's joint Adopt-A-Stream program with the Alice Ferguson Foundation. Since then, the Clean Water Committee has been working to better understand the concerns of the many stakeholders working for a positive future for the Anacostia River and surrounding communities. From river ecology to access to natural areas, the Clean Water Committee has gained an understanding of and appreciation for the many complex issues and opportunities surrounding land use decisions in this sensitive natural area.

In September, the Clean Water Committee organized a boat tour with Anacostia Riverkeeper Captain Trey Sherard. A group of 10 boarded Riverkeeper's pontoon boat at the Yards Park Marina, about one and one-half miles north of where the Anacostia River joins with the Potomac River at Buzzard Point. Streaming upriver past the recently re-developed west bank, Captain Sherard shared some of the recent history of this drastically altered estuary, highlighting some of the few remaining open spaces which present opportunities for restoration.

The CSX Bridge (named for the CSX Railroad), about three and one-half miles north of the confluence, marks the entry to "Narnia" as this reach of the Anacostia is commonly known. Here the character of the River changes dramatically, with restored wetlands dominating the east bank and the Kingman and Heritage Islands, portions of which were recently designated as State Conservation Areas and Critical Wildlife Areas, visible to the west. The East Capitol Street Bridge bifurcates the Islands. Benning Road Bridge, about five miles north of the confluence, marks the

southern end of the free-flowing river reach which extends two miles north to the District Line. The historic Langston Golf Course, the United States National Arboretum, and the Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens occupy the riverfront. Visitors are struck by the natural beauty of this section of the river, just three miles east of the United States Capitol Building.

Though the tour ended at Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, the Anacostia River actually begins near the intersection of the Northwest Branch and the Northeast Branch at Bladensburg Marina, the northernmost point of the River. This area received a Maryland State "Scenic and Wild" designation in 1984. Search <u>The Real DC: River City</u> to hear from Anacostia Riverkeeper.

To get involved with the DC Chapter's Clean Water Committee, contact committee chair Larry Martin at <u>clean.water@dc.sierraclub.org</u>.

# Lead Water Service Line Replacements Slow and not so Steady

#### By Janice Kullman, Clean Water committee member

The Sierra Club has embarked on a joint project with the NAACP-DC to address another area of environmental injustice in Washington, DC: lead in our water and our air. Our partners at NAACP tell us that among children living in the District, child lifetime asthma is nearly four times more prevalent among Black children, at 23%, than White children at 6.5%. Indeed, children living in wards 7 and 8 are 20 times more likely to go to the hospital emergency rooms for their asthma than children living in ward 3. For adults in wards 7 and 8 the incidence is almost 3 times higher. One of the largest factors causing these results is poor quality housing. Volunteers and staff are digging into the government agencies in the District that regulate lead, replace lead water pipes and enforce lead regulations. That is no small task as there are 6, yes 6, DC government agencies that have a hand in those efforts including the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), DC Housing Authority (DCHA), Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA), Department of Human Services (DHS), DC Water, Department of Health Care Finance (DHCF), and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Within each of these agencies there are sometimes multiple offices dealing with lead issues.

While our research has only reached the tip of this regulatory iceberg, the inquiry so far raises many questions. Do all these varied agencies work together? Should the effort be more centralized or are there perhaps not enough parts of the government involved? For example, part of the DC government is an Office of Tenant Advocacy, while the title implies that office might be a good place to go if you suspect old peeling paint might have lead in it, it turns out that office does not deal with lead issues at all. Why not have them refer residents who might have lead in their homes, when the newly formed Lead Hazard Reduction Branch reports that even after conducting numerous outreach activities like sending postcards, WebEx community engagement sessions, and social media advertisement, the biggest barrier to their success is enrollment in the program?

The Lead Hazard Reduction Branch administers the Lead Reduction Program and the Lead Pipe Replacement Assistance Program, which assists homeowners with replacing their private-side partial lead pipes. This office sounds like it might be central to remediating the problems of lead in our water, but it is still new and not fully staffed yet. The funding for this office consists of a grant for \$3.6 million from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through September 2023, with \$3 million for lead reduction and \$600k for healthy homes supplemental funding. It also has \$2 million for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and their staff report to us that they are hoping for another ARPA grant for FY 2023.

Another office of the District government addressing lead problems is The Lead-Safe and Healthy Housing Division (LSHHD). Lead-Safe and Healthy Housing – protects the health of District residents by monitoring lead safety throughout the District's housing stock and by raising awareness of other residential environmental and safety hazards; provides oversight of mold remediation, radon exposure, and ensuring safe drinking water in child care facilities by providing filters for drinking water sources; and provides healthy homes inspections to reduce environmental issues in homes. Its budget and staffing is more robust with a FY 2022 budget of \$5.7 million and a staff of 27, 25 of whom are devoted exclusively to lead issues.

Another question raised with all these agencies and offices involved is how effective the coordination is between them. The Office of Lead reduction reports that it does coordinate with other teams in DOEE, such as the Lead Safe and Healthy Housing Division, for referrals. It also works with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for the required environmental reviews of these properties for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Recently there was a meeting of the Lead Poisoning Elimination and Healthy Homes Advisory Committee (LPEHHC) that included representatives from these offices as well as the NAACP and the Sierra Club. These meetings are a great step in coordinating all the varied offices and stakeholders. As we continue our research and investigation, we ask still more questions. How do you pressure a government to address what is likely implicit bias in its programs and enforcement? How do you get it to focus on enforcement generally? These are the questions we are asking as we gather more and more information and try to find or mete out social justice with environmental justice.

To get involved in safe water issues in the District, contact Clean Water committee chair Larry Martin at <u>clean.water@dc.sierraclub.org</u>.

# Supporting the DC Chapter: Making a Difference Now & Later

By Matt Gravatt, Fundraising Chair

The DC Chapter works tirelessly to advance meaningful progress on clean energy, safe streets, protecting our shared air and water, reducing waste, and supporting environmental justice in DC by empowering our community to take action to be healthier, cleaner, and greener. Over many years, and even through the toughest of times, the DC Chapter has consistently delivered results moving DC toward a better future that benefits all in our community and nearby nature. We're a small, yet powerful, organization and we rely on financial support from our community to deliver these results. <u>Please consider a contribution to support our work here</u>.

SUPPORT OUR WORK: CLICK HERE TO DONATE TODAY!

All contributions stay right here in DC and support our impactful work.

One of the easiest and most impactful ways to support the DC Chapter is to make a <u>monthly gift</u> at a level that works for you. For the amount of a coffee or a drink out each month, our monthly supporters help to support our ongoing advocacy

campaigns. A donation of even a few bucks a month makes a tremendous impact. <u>Will you pledge \$5 or \$10 to support your DC Chapter?</u>

#### Planned Giving

You can leave an enduring environmental legacy by including the DC Chapter of Sierra Club in your will, living trust, or other estate plan. Keeping your gift local empowers effective conservation work for years to come.

There are many benefits to this type of giving and we are happy to work with you to ensure your legacy endures. Our chapter fundraising team works with experienced (and local!) Sierra Club fundraising staff and would love to meet with you or set up a call to discuss your goals.

For more information about bequests and planned giving, including sample gift language for your will or trust, contact us at <u>fundraising@dc.sierraclub.org</u>.

#### Donate an unneeded or unused vehicle

Do you have a vehicle that you no longer need or use? When you donate a vehicle through <u>CARS</u>, you reduce your environmental impact, help protect the environment, receive a tax deduction, and support the important efforts of your DC chapter. CARS will pick up most cars, trucks, trailers, boats, RVS, motorcycles, off-road vehicles, and heavy equipment, making it easy for you to support the DC Chapter's work to move toward a greener future.

**Note:** Please make sure you select "Sierra Club Foundation Washington DC Chapter" when the form asks you to select a chapter for your donation.

#### Connect with Us

Our chapter fundraising team can work with you to identify how you may best support the DC Chapter, including:

- how you can make a tax-deductible contribution,
- how to contribute stocks or other investments,
- how to plan a legacy gift or include us in your estate,
- or, to better understand our work and support needs.

For more information about you you can support your DC Chapter of the Sierra Club, please contact us at <u>fundraising@dc.sierraclub.org</u>



Photo Courtesy of NPS

## **Rock Creek Park - DC's National Park**

Rock Creek Park is one of America's oldest national parks and first urban park. Despite it being a national park, and a unit of the National Park System, Rock Creek Park sometimes doesn't get the recognition it deserves due to its name.

Rock Creek Park is one of America's oldest national parks and the nation's first urban park--it was the third national park designated by the U.S. Government.

Changing the name of the park from Rock Creek Park to **Rock Creek National Park** would help to recognize the importance and prominence of this iconic national park in our nation's capital.

Our Representative, Eleanor Holmes Norton, has introduced a bill (H.R. 5384) in Congress to change the name of the park and help elevate it to the national prominence it deserves, helping both to ensure the park gets the support it needs in Congress and highlighting its importance within the national park system. You can help!

Add your name in support of Rock Creek National Park!

## **DC Chapter Election 2021**

The DC Chapter is holding an election for the executive committee in November and December. The chapter executive committee is the governing body of the chapter. There are five open slots on the committee, and six candidates: Barbara Briggs, Matt Gravatt, Lara Levison, Larry Martin, Peter Quinn-Jacobs, and Fred Wise. The election will be conducted online from November 15 - December 15. Be on the lookout for an email with your electronic ballot and please make sure to vote! You can help us in the meantime by going to

https://myaccount.sierraclub.org/MyAccountLogin to update your account and mail preferences to allow for emails to be sent to you.

# In case you missed it: Leadership transition at Sierra Club

Dan Chu, current Executive Director of the Sierra Club Foundation and longtime leader at the organization, will step into the role of Acting Executive Director immediately, in partnership with Eva Hernandez-Simmons, also a longtime Sierra Club leader and organizer, who will step into the role of Managing Director.

You can read more in the <u>statements</u> from Sierra Club President Ramon Cruz, outgoing Executive Director Michael Brune, and acting Executive Director Dan Chu and Managing Director Eva Hernandez-Simmons, Acting Executive Director and Sierra Club.

## An update on our organizational response to COVID

From Dan Chu, Sierra Club Acting Executive Director

Based on feedback from employees and in consultation with our safety staff, we have decided to extend the Sierra Club's current Covid response plans through February 28, 2022. Given the current Covid situation, we recognize the need to offer continued flexibility for you to balance and manage your individual needs. We will continue on the path we launched in July--slowly reopening our offices, methodically ramping up events & in-person activities, and being cautious in travel planning. Doing so patiently allows our mission-critical work in these areas to continue.

It is our hope that the expansion of vaccine access to young children this fall and winter will enable us as an organization to quickly ramp back up our operations--and scale back our response--in the spring. Barring any unforeseen complications, we expect to share an update with you all by February.

I am grateful for everything our staff and volunteer communities have done to help Sierra Club weather this trying time. For more details on this extension, please review the information and links on our <u>Coronavirus Info Hub</u>.

## **Events & Volunteer Opportunities**

**Urban Infill Guidance webinar on Active Transportation** - *Monday, November 15 at 8pm (virtual)* 

The Infill Task Force, made up of a team of Sierra Club volunteers working on land use and infill in their communities, along with the Healthy Communities & Transportation volunteer team and the Clean Transportation for All campaign, are joining together to host webinars to go through various sections of Sierra Club's new Urban Infill Guidance. The last two webinar topics are:

*Active Transportation* on November 15, and *Resilience and Labor* on December 20.

Learn more about Sierra Club's Urban Infill Guidance and RSVP here: <u>http://sc.org/infill</u>

**Energy 101: What motivates an electric utility?** - *Thursday, November 18 at 7pm (virtual)* 

If you care about climate change and transitioning to clean energy, but need an intro or want a refresher on the wonky details and background, then this is the training series for you. It can give you a basic foundation for understanding energy, grids, utilities, and hear a little about other renewable energy trends around the country. Here are the final upcoming trainings:

*Training #3 - November 18th What motivates an electric utility? How can we make them change?* Join us for info on how utilities make decisions and how to tell when the hurdles to renewable energy they present are real or red herrings. We will be joined by guest speakers who have worked to push utilities toward more renewable energy to benefit their communities.

(December) Renewable Trends: Where is the industry going?

More info, past recordings, and RSVP at <u>https://www.mobilize.us/sierraclubaction/event/406411/</u>

Save the Date: DC Chapter Holiday Party & Silent Auction Fundraiser -Wednesday, December 8, 2021 at 6pm (virtual)

Our chapter's Annual Holiday Party & Silent Auction Fundraiser is taking place (virtually) on Wednesday, December 8. You can RSVP at <u>http://bit.ly/SCHoliday21</u>. The Virtual Auction will begin on December 1. We also need volunteers to make this a success. If you're interested in volunteering for our event, <u>fill out this form</u> and we'll be in touch!



## **New Volunteers and Activists wanted!**

The Sierra Club works for clean energy, zero waste, clean water, and sustainable transportation. <u>Fill out our Volunteer Form to get involved</u>.

While our offices remain closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, our committee meetings have remained active and online. RSVP early to get the link for video conferencing. Phone options are also available.

### **DC Chapter Committee Meetings**

These and other events are always posted on our chapter calendar at <u>sierraclub.org/dc/calendar</u>

**Zero Waste Committee Meeting** - *Tuesday, November 9 at 6:30pm (online)* Contact Doreen Campbell (<u>zero.waste@dc.sierraclub.org</u>) for more information. <u>RSVP here</u>.

Smart Growth Committee Meeting - Wednesday, November 10 at 6:45pm (online) Contact Payton Chung (<u>smart.growth@dc.sierraclub.org</u>) for more information. <u>RSVP here</u>.

**Clean Energy Committee Meeting** - *Tuesday, November 16 at 6:30pm (online)* Contact Lara Levison (<u>clean.energy@dc.sierraclub.org</u>) for more information. <u>RSVP</u> <u>here</u>.

**Clean Water Committee Meeting** - *Wednesday, November 17 at 6:30pm (online)* Contact Larry Martin (<u>clean.water@dc.sierraclub.org</u>) for more information. <u>RSVP</u> <u>here</u>.

**DC Chapter Executive Committee Meeting** - *Tuesday, November* 23 at 6:30pm (online)

Dues-paying Sierra Club members can attend meetings of the Executive Committee which usually take place the fourth Wednesday of each month at 6:30pm. For meeting details, please email <u>WashingtonDC.Chapter@SierraClub.org</u> at least 48 hours in advance with subject line: ExCom meeting guest.

Not sure if your membership is active? Join or renew here: <u>http://sc.org/JoinDC</u> or check your account here: <u>https://myaccount.sierraclub.org/MyAccountLogin</u>. You can also use this page to update your account and mail preferences.

## Thank you for your support!

As always, we couldn't do this without your support. Sign up to be a monthly donor to keep our campaigns, committees, and advocacy going. <u>Giving \$5, \$10, or \$20 a</u> <u>month</u> can greatly increase our effectiveness as we communicate with our members and activate our campaigns. Just check the box to make your gift monthly.



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