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

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![A DC dandelion sparkles in spring](image)

**Sparkling into Spring**
“Explore” is the first word in the Sierra Club mission. Yet with our Chapter’s intense focus on everything from ridding DC of lead pipes, to reducing plastic waste, to supporting bicycle infrastructure on Connecticut Avenue, it’s easy to forget that access to nature is a passion of the Sierra Club. This year, exploring has taken on a very different meaning. While my physical world has become so much smaller, it has also expanded in ways I’d not contemplated before. Have you ever awaited the budding of trees with such anticipation? Has the color of the redbuds ever been such a deep magenta? What are your plans for celebrating the emergence of Brood X? I hope you’re finding positive and inspiring experiences that you want to hold onto as we emerge from this difficult time. I hope you’ve found ways to explore. And, hang in there. We’ll be back to in-person events as soon as we possibly can.

WMATA Metrobus on the streets of DC

DC Council Calls for Clean Electric Metrobus Fleet

By Claire August, Clean Energy Committee member

The Clean Transportation Subcommittee has been working with a coalition of organizations in the region to promote serious steps for electrifying the Metrobus fleet. Traffic-based air pollution, especially from diesel buses, contributes to respiratory illnesses that affect those near heavily trafficked routes. That is not even to mention the climate change effects of running our region's public transit on diesel. Earlier this month, after Sierra Club member Lucas Godshalk testified in support of Metrobus electrification at the DC Council Oversight hearing for Metro, DC Council Chair Phil Mendelson introduced a resolution expressing the Council's sense that Metro must electrify the bus fleet on a timeline that meets or exceeds the goals set in the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Act of 2018, with at least 50 percent of its bus fleet electrified by 2030, 75 percent by 2035, 90 percent by 2040, and 100 percent by 2045. All 13 members of the Council signed this resolution in a show of unity. We are proud of our work connecting with DC council members on this issue, and we will continue to engage with our DC and regional partners on bus electrification.
You can help! Take action by signing the petition here: [http://sc.org/wmata](http://sc.org/wmata). If you’re interested in joining local efforts to electrify our transportation, please email Lucas Godshalk at [clean.transportation@dc.sierraclub.org](mailto:clean.transportation@dc.sierraclub.org) to join our subcommittee’s monthly meetings.

**Mayor Appoints New Public Service Commissioner**

*By Peter Quinn-Jacobs, Clean Energy Committee Vice Chair*

The Clean Energy Committee welcomes Emile Thompson, the newest member of the DC Public Service Commission, to the energy regulatory community in the District. At his confirmation hearing in March, Thompson pledged to hold utilities accountable to meeting DC’s climate commitments, and he acknowledged that DC’s Canadian-owned gas utility has a “business model seeming to be, on its face, incompatible with our climate commitments.”

Thompson previously served on the DC Water board of directors and was an assistant U.S. attorney in DC before the DC Council confirmed his appointment to the commission on April 7. Thompson said he is personally committed to addressing climate change through equitable policy, including modernizing the District’s electric grid and transportation electrification. He also said that as a commissioner, he will always be available to clean energy advocates to discuss their concerns.

The Sierra Club testified at the hearing that the commission is not fulfilling its obligation to uphold DC’s climate commitments and needs more proactive leadership. We look forward to working with Emile Thompson to ensure DC’s transition to 100 percent clean energy.
A Climate Solution... If We Can Keep It

By Brian Reed, Energy Efficiency Subcommittee Vice Chair

An important element of the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Act of 2018 is the groundbreaking Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS) program. It requires large, existing buildings to meet minimum efficiency requirements—the so-called BEPS “standards.” The first standards, published on January 1 this year, will start to be enforced in 2026 and apply to buildings 50,000 square feet in floor area and larger. Smaller buildings will be subject to the requirement in subsequent years.

BEPS aims to reduce DC’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by almost 800,000 tons of carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions per year by 2032—about 10 percent of the District’s total emissions in 2018. But hitting this goal will rely on making the rules strong, effective, and timely, as the Sierra Club told the District government in public comments submitted in March.

Unfortunately, BEPS is under attack from members of DC’s building industry, who complain they cannot comply with the requirements due to covid-19, despite the deadline being nearly five years away. Meanwhile the District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) is bending over backwards to address their concerns.

As the number of covid-19 cases fall in DC, the climate is at a tipping point. The District needs to move forward with BEPS to meet its climate targets if there is any hope of avoiding a global disaster that will be more enduring than this pandemic.

For more information about advocating for energy efficiency in DC, contact the
Zero Waste Committee Taming Takeout Trash Webinar Series

By Susan Schorr, Zero Waste Committee member

A Zero Waste Committee webinar series explores how to tame the rising tide of takeout trash, a growing challenge as the pandemic led restaurants and customers to pivot to takeout dining.

More than 130 people attended a webinar on March 31, 2021 to explore how reusable container services from other cities could find a home in DC. Customers are demanding reusable container services to prevent waste from happening. Reusables “turn that faucet off right at the source,” said Crystal Dreisbach, a panelist in the webinar from GreenToGo, a North Carolina-based reusable take-out container service. The webinar is available online.

The next event in the series, to be held early this summer, will explore efforts to launch these services in DC to benefit restaurants, consumers and local government alike. Watch our calendar dc.sierraclub.org/calendar to RSVP.

For more information about the DC Chapter’s Zero Waste Committee, contact Doreen Campbell at zero.waste@dc.sierraclub.org.
End Zone to Ecosystem: RFK Stadium Site Remediation

By Amanda Schultz, DC Chapter Intern

This semester, I have been focusing my work as an intern on the RFK Stadium site remediation. I have been learning the process of environmental advocacy as I write how conservation should be the main goal of this area.
The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium is a defunct multipurpose stadium located east of the U.S. Capitol in Ward 6. It opened in 1961 and is located near the west bank of the Anacostia River and next to the DC Armory. Events DC currently owns and operates the RFK stadium site and adjacent recreational fields and parking lots. The lease from the National Park Service expires in 2038. While the surrounding community occasionally uses the sports fields and parking lots, the stadium itself was decommissioned last winter and is scheduled for destruction beginning in 2022, with differing opinions on how the land should be developed once this occurs.

The Anacostia River, once revered for its clarity and biodiversity, has been damaged over the course of many years. The land itself was historically a wetland ecosystem that served as flood control and wildlife habitat, while filtering air and water pollutants. Some of these fundamental ecosystem services may only be truly valued when threatened or diminished. These services could be maximized, and the surrounding community’s health, resources, and wildlife, would benefit greatly by turning this site back to its natural landscape instead of the impervious surfaces and turf fields currently present.

Restoration of the habitat is the best option for human and environmental health as it serves as stormwater flood barrier and protection, filters out air and water pollutants, traps carbon, and builds resiliency with more biodiversity. Prioritizing the health and integrity of the environment should be a focus, and this can be practically investigated using basic benefit-cost analysis. Putting a monetary value, however, on the ecosystem can prove to be difficult for comparison although it can be done utilizing Ecosystem Service Valuation. By analyzing these relevant ecosystem services, the outcomes of environmental decision-making can be improved when compared to alternative development proposals.

To make progress amid the climate crisis, we need widespread change. However, tackling this is a daunting feat. It starts with groups like the Sierra Club, supported and fueled by volunteers and members, that push our leaders and encourage our neighbors to give back to the planet that sustains us. This begins by prioritizing conservation at sites just like the RFK Stadium.

*If you would like to be involved in clean water advocacy in the District, please join our meetings on the third Wednesday of every month at 6:30pm. For more information, please contact Larry Martin at clean.water@dc.sierraclub.org.*
Members from the Washington Interfaith Network and Sierra Club DC find ways to act together in 2021

**Imagining a Green Future Workshop with Washington Interfaith Network and Sierra Club**

*By Sara Lepley, Communications Committee Chair*

We could live in a DC with equitable green jobs, electrified housing, clean air and affordability. But getting there means building political power.

Sierra Club partnered with the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) on a workshop called “Imagining a Just Green Future,” to connect and educate local environmental and faith leaders. The event focused on coalition building, bringing together leaders from different faith backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to share stories and build collective power.

The task at hand: Getting DC off fossil fuels and instead incentivizing clean energy technology like heat pumps and solar panels to power our buildings. DC currently burns methane gas or fracked gas to provide heat and hot water in many buildings. This methane is 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in contributing to climate change and poses serious health risks for residents. Switching to renewable sources isn’t just better for the earth and our health, it also would allow us to create good paying jobs in DC.

To translate this goal into action, guests committed to attending a gas sniffing event, hosting a presentation or signing a petition.

Mark Rodeffer, co-chair of the Sierra Club’s Beyond Gas DC campaign, warns that it won’t be easy. Washington Gas has a significant amount of money and influence.

“We are up against the number one corporate polluter in DC,” Rodeffer said. “But we have something t