

As people across the country protest in defense of Black lives, the Sierra Club recognizes the need to dismantle systemic racism in the United States and within our own organization. We must reckon with how white supremacy -- both past and present -- has shaped our institutions and do the critical anti-racism work necessary to repair the harm done. The environmental movement does not exist in a vacuum, and it is our responsibility to use our power to help abolish systemic racism, which is destroying lives, communities, and the planet.



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

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DC Chapter ExCom Virtual Meetings

Sierra Club Meetings in the Time of Covid-19

By Catherine Plume, DC Chapter Chair

Despite viruses, quarantines, and turmoil over the last few months, the hard work of the chapter has prevailed. In March, as covid-19 began to spread across the country, we quickly pivoted all of our meetings to a virtual format via Zoom.

While we miss seeing you in person, we've also found that virtual gatherings make it easier for some people to attend committee meetings and get involved. In addition to holding online committee meetings, we've also held virtual happy hours featuring local environmental celebrities such as WAMU environmental reporter Jacob Fenston and DC Councilmember Mary Cheh.

Though we look forward to returning to in-person meetings at some point, we'll likely continue with virtual meeting options even after the pandemic ends (which can't come soon enough!).

And we've been busy! We've launched a long-needed fundraising committee to help the chapter navigate these uncertain times while keeping our activism strong. We endorsed a slate of environmentally-minded DC Council candidates for the June Democratic primary (see more on this below), and we're thrilled that almost all won! We also provided testimony on the mayor's proposed budget, and we will continue to follow this work. Meanwhile, we're [supporting](#) the Black Lives Matter and [DC Statehood](#) movements – all while wearing masks and doing our best to maintain social distancing. I hope you'll enjoy reading more about our activities in this newsletter, and I hope it will spur you to get more involved. There's never been a more urgent time to engage.



DC Activists at the Black Lives Matter protests

DC Chapter Stands with Black Lives Matter

By John More, Sierra Club DC Chapter

The Sierra Club has issued strong statements of [solidarity](#) and [support](#) for Black Lives Matter with particular focus on the core concept of environmental justice. The starkly disparate effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the Black communities of DC, especially in Wards 7 and 8, had already created a call for a broader effort to address structural racism before demonstrations filled our streets calling for the end of police killings.

These statements of support and solidarity analyze the history of slavery, control of the land, and worse environmental conditions in Black communities across the United States. But the statements alone are not enough. The question now clearly is: "What are you going to do to change things?"

The good news is that the Sierra Club has already been incorporating environmental justice into our policies and actions. Within the DC Chapter, we have made affordable housing as well as the disparate effects of air pollution and drinking water pollution in Black communities in DC core environmental issues in our work.

[Recent examples](#) of the chapter and its members engaging in environmental justice actions supporting Black Lives Matter include:

- Submitting testimony on the Metropolitan Police Department budget and the connection between environmental justice and racial justice.
- Calling for an acceleration of DC's transition to renewable energy, energy efficiency, and clean water in the 2021 Department of Energy and Environment budget, linking the call specifically to the needs of DC's disadvantaged Black neighborhoods.

- Working against a proposed budget raid on the Green Building Fund, which helps fund green solutions for affordable housing.
- Actively engaging with community leaders to listen to and learn their environmental concerns.

But this is only the beginning. If you have ideas for new initiatives or ways we can make our work more inclusive and equitable, please contact any of our [committee](#) chairs.

Chapter Weighs in on DC Budget

By Lara Levison, Clean Energy Committee Chair

The annual budget process for the District of Columbia provides the Sierra Club DC Chapter with the opportunity to advocate for key environmental policies and funding for them.

Each year, typically in March, the mayor submits her proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year to the DC Council. The District's fiscal year is the same as the federal government's: it begins on October 1 and ends on September 30 of the following calendar year. Unlike Congress, the Council must finalize DC's budget before the end of the fiscal year. The Council holds public hearings on the mayor's proposed budget. Then, as with any other law, the Council amends it, votes on it, and sends it to the mayor to be signed into law (or vetoed).

This year, the mayor's budget was delayed and re-written to respond to the public health emergency, to add funding for new needs created by the pandemic, as well as to reduce funding due to the loss of revenue caused by the necessity for social distancing. The [updated budget](#) was released on May 18. Because the schedule for considering the budget was greatly expedited, the public had fewer opportunities than usual to weigh in. Some Council committees held a single virtual "public witness day" to receive testimony for all agencies under their jurisdiction, while others only accepted testimony submitted in writing or by phone.

Undaunted by these restrictions, Sierra Club volunteers wrote and submitted testimony on proposed budgets for several DC agencies. You can read these testimonies below:

- [Department of Public Works](#)
- [Department of Energy & the Environment](#)
- [Department of General Services](#)
- [Public Service Commission](#)
- [Department of Transportation](#)
- [DC Public Housing Authority](#)
- [Metropolitan Police Department](#)
- [Opposing a raid on the Green Building Fund](#)

The DC Council is expected to finish amending and voting on the FY21 budget by the end of July. [Visit here](#) to see the Council's budget schedule.

Budget Review with DC Transportation Director

By Ayk Yilmaz, Smart Growth Committee

The Sierra Club DC Chapter and the DC Environmental Network organized a meeting with District Department of Transportation Director Jeff Marootian to go over the changes to the DC transportation budget.

During the June 1 virtual meeting, the director emphasized that while there were some reductions in certain programs, most funding for major environmental initiatives remain intact. We're pleased that the DC government is maintaining its commitments to Vision Zero, electric buses, bike lanes, and other important programs during this difficult time for the budget, and we hope to continue to engage the environmental community on transportation issues going forward.

For more information about advocating for green transportation in DC, contact the Smart Growth Committee at smart.growth@dc.sierraclub.org.

Sierra Club Seeking to Shut Off Fracked Gas Pipeline in DC

By Mark Rodeffer, Beyond Gas Subcommittee Co-Chair

The Sierra Club is opposing a plan by DC's fracked gas utility to keep DC hooked on fossil fuels while increasing prices for ratepayers.

The gas utility, Washington Gas, is required to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, but instead, the utility is asking for permission to continue selling fracked gas while mixing it with gas from animal manure. The proposal is unrealistic – there's a limited supply of manure gas, it costs 10 times more than traditional gas, and manure gas relies on unsustainable factory farming.

The Washington Gas plan offers no vision for moving toward clean home heating systems, such as heat pumps powered by renewable energy.

On June 15, the Sierra Club filed [comments and a technical review](#) with the DC Public Service Commission. The Sierra Club wants the Commission to reject the fracked gas plan and begin a proceeding to move the utility toward zero emissions by 2050.

Also on June 15, the Sierra Club filed [testimony](#) against the Washington Gas proposal to waste hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade pipes that will become obsolete as we move away from fossil fuels.

For more information on the Sierra Club DC Chapter's Beyond Gas campaign, visit beyondgasdc.org or email beyondgas@dc.sierraclub.org.

'Cooking with Gas' – Not Clean, Not Green, and Not Healthy!

By Barbara Briggs, Beyond Gas Subcommittee

The bulk of DC's gas emissions come from heating buildings and water heating. A much smaller amount of the gas emissions come from stoves, but the health impacts from stoves are significant.

The gas used in homes is methane, which when burned (even in a properly functioning gas stove), emits pollutants including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides including nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, and formaldehyde into the air.

Households with gas appliances often have nitrogen dioxide levels far exceeding legal outdoor air limits. This is a serious threat, given that an average person spends 90 percent of their time

indoors.

Nitrogen dioxide can contribute to pulmonary and bronchial irritation, asthma, increased susceptibility to lung infections, lung and cardiovascular system effects, impeded neurological development and learning in children. Children in households with even one gas appliance are 42 percent more likely to suffer from asthma.

Many low-income households have smaller living spaces, poor air circulation, and older appliances in poor condition, making people in those households even more vulnerable to the health impacts of gas.

If you have a gas stove, to minimize the health impact you should use an exhaust fan and open your windows when cooking on the stove. A carbon monoxide detector can also help keep you safe.

But individual fixes and consumer choices cannot solve this problem. For the health of our planet, our families, and our DC community, it is urgent that we speed transition from methane gas to clean, renewable alternatives.

For sources and more information on the health threats from gas, visit <https://www.beyondgasdc.org/health>.

Keeping Green During Covid-19

By Doreen Campbell and Susan Schorr, Zero Waste Committee

It's not easy being green during a public health emergency. The Zero Waste Committee has been compiling ways to be safe and environmentally friendly during the pandemic. Here are just a few ideas:

Safety first! When wearing a mask to control disease spread, choose a sustainable option. Fashion one out of a bandana or other fabric at home. Or support a local crafter and purchase a homemade reusable mask. Sadly, we are already seeing disposable masks littered on District streets. Let's save those for our healthcare workers who need them most at hospital settings where these items can be properly disposed of on site. Hand sanitizer can be made at home per [CDC guidelines](#), given availability of proper ingredients. Amid shortages, regulatory agencies relaxed rules for local distilleries to pivot from manufacturing alcoholic beverages to bulk hand sanitizer.

Compost your home-generated food waste. In accordance with the [Mayor's Order 2020-058](#), dated April 8, 2020, food waste drop-off at weekly farmers markets are contingent upon District government approval of waiver requests to operate during the pandemic. Check <https://dpw.dc.gov/foodwastedropoff> for current operating status. New food waste drop-off locations have begun on Tuesdays in Ward 7 and Fridays in Ward 8.

Use your reusable bags. Unlike some jurisdictions that temporarily banned reusable grocery bags, the mayor's April 8 order recognized that customers can continue to use their own reusable grocery bags while self-bagging their purchases. Even stores not set up to allow the customer to self-bag near the register, like Trader Joe's, allow customers to pack their groceries away from the register or outside.

Request no plastic bags for grocery delivery and curbside pickup. If you choose grocery delivery, these orders usually arrive drowning in plastic grocery bags stuffed with numerous items bagged in plastic produce bags inside. Committee members have had success requesting items for curb-side delivery be placed in a cardboard box with no plastic bagged items. Grocery delivery services often have a place to include special instructions or chat functions where messages can be sent once the shopper starts filling your order.

Opt-out of plastic for carryout and dine-in at restaurants. Ordering take-out or delivery is a great way to support local restaurants during their decreased operating capacity. However, take-out and delivery generates plastic waste. When placing orders, request no plastic utensils or add this request to the comments field of online platforms. As more restaurants re-open for limited in-person dining here in DC, they have the option of using disposable or cleaned, sanitized reusable table items such as utensils, drinkware, and dinnerware. Check the [guidance for restaurants from DC Health](#).

For more information about the DC Chapter's Zero Waste Committee, contact Doreen Campbell (zero.waste@dc.sierraclub.org).

Long Journey to Residential Construction Materials Reuse Win

By Doreen Campbell, Zero Waste Committee Chair

Back in 2016, Zero Waste Committee member Jim Schulman started work on reviewing residential construction and demolition (C&D) requirements for re-use of materials. As an architect, Jim saw residential construction sites with tons of easily saleable materials that are "dumpsterized" daily. While diversion of building material waste on large commercial projects was incorporated into the DC Green Construction Code, the DC Residential Building Code contained no such stipulations.

Working with the Building Materials Re-use Association (now known as Build Reuse), Jim developed proposed amendments to the code. The amendments would gently introduce residential builders and owners to the financial and public health benefits of reducing the amount of C&D debris that ends up in incinerators and landfills. The proposed amendments required that on new construction, substantial renovation, and demolition projects, a minimum of 5 percent of nonhazardous waste by weight, volume or value (based on the cost of project) be reused (i.e., salvaged from the site or installed in new work).

Making its way through the Residential Technical Advisory Group administered by the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the DC Construction Codes Coordinating Board and legal review by the Mayor's Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs, the amendments were finally approved and published in the District Register on May 29. While 5 percent may sound low, it is a step in the right direction and will force smaller builders to realize that doing the right thing is not as time-consuming or expensive as they thought. Most builders will end up saving or even making money through tax deductions from donations, reduced hauling and tipping fees, and product sales. Thanks to Jim for his persistent advocacy over several years to advocate for this important waste reduction measure is now enacted into law!

Sharing the Streets



Jeremiah Lowery

Advocacy Director,
Washington Area Bicyclist Association



Jeremiah Lowery from WABA, first speaker for our Sharing the Streets series

New Speaker Series Looks to Share the Streets

By Sara Lepley, Smart Growth Committee

We know we need safer streets for all cyclists, walkers, and even drivers in DC. But how?

On June 25th, nearly 50 people showed up online to learn, ask questions and share their experiences on this topic during our first ever "Sharing the Streets" virtual event. Jeremiah Lowery, advocacy director at the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, made for an excellent first speaker. Passionate, knowledgeable, and inspiring, he dug into what bicycle advocacy looks like, where it's needed most, and why it's a fight worth fighting.

Our speaker series explores how to share the streets literally and ensure we're equitably sharing the benefits of new transportation approaches with all residents. Our next speaker, Kori Johnson of Safe Routes Partnership, [joins us July 30](#). She'll focus on making walking and biking a safe and enjoyable experience for kids in Wards 7 and 8.

Going forward, we need volunteers for general planning as well as day-of assistance. To get involved, please email Sara Lepley at saradlep@vt.edu. And to attend, RSVP at <https://bit.ly/SharingTheStreetsKori>.

DC Chapter Has A New Fundraising Committee

By Jon Apfelbaum, Fundraising Committee Chair

We've created a new fundraising committee to help us raise funds to support the chapter's conservation priorities.

Several Chapter volunteers who have professional fundraising experience are leading this effort. The committee hopes to engage current and new donors by building strong relationships and promoting the chapter's work. The fundraising committee has already had success hosting online events, including the recent Sierra Club 128th Birthday Party with special guest Councilmember Mary Cheh. Participants socialized and discussed environmental priorities in DC.

With several upcoming projects later this summer, the committee looks forward to expanding outreach and increasing the chapter's online presence.

Support from our members and volunteers is vital to the success of the chapter and its initiatives. To become a member of the Sierra Club, visit <http://sc.org/JoinDC>. If you would like to donate, please visit <http://sc.org/DonateDC>.

If you would like to make a large gift, or want to get involved in the DC Chapter's Fundraising Committee, contact Jon Apfelbaum (fundraising@dc.sierraclub.org).

Sierra Club Campaigns for Environmental Allies in DC Primary

By Mark Rodeffer, Political Committee Chair

Four of the five candidates the Sierra Club endorsed for DC Council won in the June 2 Democratic primary.

In Ward 4, Janeese Lewis George scored an upset win over entrenched and well-funded incumbent Brandon Todd. The Sierra Club endorsed George because of her commitment to affordable housing powered by clean energy and her support for electrifying the Metrobus fleet so that commuters can enjoy safe and emissions-free transportation. The Sierra Club was proud to organize dozens of volunteers to make hundreds of calls in support of Janeese Lewis George.

In Ward 7, the Sierra Club endorsed Vince Gray, the architect of the Sustainable DC plan who since has proven a consistent ally of the Sierra Club and all environmentalists in the District of Columbia. Gray was re-elected by a comfortable margin.

In Ward 8, the Sierra Club endorsed Trayon White, who co-introduced the 2018 climate bill that's moving DC to electricity from 100 percent renewable sources. The only incumbent to participate in DC's fair election public financing program, White won with about 60 percent of the vote.

In the at-large DC Council race, the Sierra Club strongly supported Robert White, as we did in his 2016 upset win over an entrenched councilmember. White has opposed efforts to weaken DC's 2018 clean energy law, has consistently pushed for increased energy efficiency and renewable energy in DC government buildings, and has supported protected bike lanes amid strong opposition. He ran unopposed in the primary.

In the Ward 2 race, the Sierra Club endorsed Patrick Kennedy, an advisory neighborhood commissioner with an eight-year track record of championing sustainable transportation and clean energy. Kennedy came in second place, behind Brooke Pinto, a former assistant attorney general. Pinto also won the special election to fill out the remainder of the term of the former Ward 2 councilmember. She was sworn in late June. The Sierra Club looks forward to working with Pinto to address climate change, environmental justice, and resource conservation.

We Are Eager to Find New Volunteers and Activists

The Sierra Club works for clean energy, zero waste, clean water, and sustainable transportation. Fill out our [Volunteer Form](#) to get involved!

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.

Committee Meetings

Smart Growth Committee Meeting - Wednesday, July 8 at 6:45pm (online)
Contact Payton Chung (smart.growth@dc.sierraclub.org) for more information. [RSVP here.](#)

Zero Waste Committee Meeting - Tuesday, July 14 at 6:30pm (online)
Contact Doreen Campbell (zero.waste@dc.sierraclub.org) for more information. [RSVP here.](#)

Clean Water Committee Meeting - Wednesday, July 15 at 6:30pm (online)
Contact Ankita Mandelia (clean.water@dc.sierraclub.org) for more information. [RSVP here.](#)

Clean Energy Committee Meeting - Tuesday, July 21 at 6:30pm (online)
Contact Lara Levison (clean.energy@dc.sierraclub.org) for more information. [RSVP here.](#)

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

[Donate](#)

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. Giving [\\$5, \\$10, or \\$20](#) a month can greatly increase our effectiveness as we communicate with our members and activate our campaigns. Just check the box to make your gift monthly.



The [COVID-19 crisis](#) has not passed and continues to [disproportionately harm](#) Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and other communities of color. The pandemic has revealed how the communities hardest hit are often the same communities that suffer from high levels of pollution and poor access to healthcare. The fight for environmental justice cannot be separated from the fight for racial justice.