



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GROUP

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2024, the Prince George's County Sierra Club Group (PGSC) focused on engaging the local community through educational events, outings, service projects, tabling events, and community science. We also frequently testified at County Council hearings about local land use decisions, budget priorities, tree conservation regulations, electrification, and more.

2024 LEADERSHIP TEAM

The leadership team met monthly. Meetings were virtual. The Prince George's County Sierra Club leadership team for 2024 is listed below. The elected *voting members of the Executive Committee* are indicated in *bold*.

- ***Kathy Bartolomeo***, Secretary
- ***Tyrah Cobb-Davis***, Membership Team, Climate Action Team
- ***Lily Fountain***, Membership Chair; Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Team Lead
- ***Janet Gingold***, Outings Chair, Climate Action Team Lead, Communications team, Political Committee
- ***Joseph Jakuta***, Vice-Chair, Legislative Team, Climate Parents, Communications Team (Social Media)
- ***Nicole Jackson***, Membership Team, Communications Team
- ***James Lawson***, Delegate to Chapter Executive Committee
- ***Antoine Thompson***, Transportation team, Outreach
- *Martha Ainsworth*, Zero Waste Team Lead
- *Nancy Hammond*, Treasurer
- *Nick Orrick*, Political Committee Chair; Transportation Team Lead
- *Janis Oppelt*, Communications Team, Zero Waste Team, Nominations Committee
- *John Straub*, Webmaster

Additional SuperVolunteers

- *Anne Riley*, Emerita
- *Bill Walmsley*, Stewardship
- *Louise Spangle*, Outings Leader
- *Geoffrey Collins*, City Nature Challenge



Advocacy Letters/Testimony

The Prince George's Group launched an Add Up Campaign in response to CR-22-2024, which extended use of the old zoning code. The campaign surpassed its goal of 50 supporters, though it was unsuccessful in stopping the County Council from rolling back zoning reforms (<https://addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/put-a-stop-to-sprawl-zoning---say-no-to-cr-22-2024>).

PGSC provided written and oral testimony on 19 issues before our County Council and our County Planning Board. Notable successes included

1. Passage of CB 20-2024, CB 21-2024, and CB 22-2024, which provide comprehensive tree conservation legislation that exceeds new state requirements, including updates to the Woodland and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Ordinance and ordinances regarding tree canopy coverage and stream buffers
2. Passage of CB 67-2024 and CB 105-2024, which establish requirements for EV charging infrastructure for new multifamily, commercial, and mixed-use developments though at percentages inadequate to meet county climate goals.
3. Defeat of CB 52-2024, which would have made it easier to build data centers by removing a requirement for review by the planning board and a public hearing.
4. Passage of CB 72-2024, which prohibits the sale, planting, and growing of invasive bamboo.
5. A requirement for rooftop solar and EV chargers at a warehouse that we opposed because it was located in the floodplain and would have adverse effects on traffic and air quality.
6. Support of a strengthened sector plan for the area near to the West Hyattsville WMATA Station, that was improved in part from our comments on previous drafts.
7. Cancellation of a development in flood plain in Hyattsville (Suffrage Point).
8. Cancellation of a bill to limit use of efficient LEDs in storefronts.

We also wrote letters concerning other bills (CB-15-2024, CB-74-2024, CB-77-2024), at least four other development projects, and comments on county agency budgets.

EDUCATIONAL EVENTS



In partnership with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®, Psi Epsilon Omega Chapter, PGSC's Climate Action Team hosted two virtual community forums that featured informative speakers and small group discussions in breakout rooms. "Let's Talk About Composting" provided practical information and advocacy for local residents to encourage participation in the county's curbside compost pick-up program.

["Environmental Justice and You: Balancing Justice and Data Center Development,"](#) on the eve of the public hearing about a local data center bill, provided presentations from experts about data center basics, the environmental impacts of data centers, and what other jurisdictions can

learn from data-center development in Virginia.



In response to a request from a local organizer of a public lecture series, PGSC sent an outings leader/Maryland Master Naturalist to give an in-person presentation at a program about the ecology and management of leaf litter. Her presentation included some reminders about the basic science of natural cycles, pictures of biodiversity in nearby parks' leaf litter, and ideas about how to "leave the leaves" to let nature complete its cycles.

The Zero Waste Team organized tours of the Prince George's County single-stream materials recycling facility in September, with 15 participants from the County, DC, and representatives from the statewide

Advisory Council for the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging bill. In October, twenty-six participants joined us to tour the County's Organics Composting Facility, including contingents of Sierra Club members from the DC Chapter and the Greater Baltimore Group. The Team tabled at Bowiefest in June and the Prince George's Green Summit in October, featuring a "recycling challenge" for visitors, information on the effectiveness of the Better Bag Bill, and a display on the need for a Maryland Bottle Bill.



Tour of the Prince George's County single-stream Materials Recycling Facility, September 2024



Tour of the Prince George's County Organics Composting Facility on October 23, 2024

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Prince George's Group launched a BlueSky account and continued to post on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads. By December 4, the Facebook page had 394 followers up from 380 followers last year. We made 218 posts with the most engagement receiving of 300 impressions. By December 4, the Instagram page had 350 followers up from 314 followers last year. We made 153 posts with the most people being

reached in single post being 86. Less posts were made given that some Facebook posts were either reposts or had no images. There were less posts on Threads given that scheduling is not available on that system and additionally Meta does not provide statistics. We have been active on BlueSky since mid-November. Posts were mostly advocacy oriented or involved sharing events, though we also continued sharing weekly nature photos taken in Prince George's County on #FloraFaunaFriday.

OUTINGS

The PGSC outings team welcomed a new certified outings leader and hosted monthly local outings to help people connect with nature at parks near home. Highlights included a First-Day Hike, two citizen-science expeditions during the City Nature Challenge, and an Earth-Day clean-up outing to rescue municipal trees from invasive vines, as well as explorations of Jug Bay Natural Area, Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary, Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary, Patuxent Research Refuge, Cedarville State Forest, and Watkins Regional Park.



Title	Date	Participants
First Day Hike at Watkins Park	1/1/2024	17
Shades of Green at Cedarville State Forest	1/28/2024	6
Walk at Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary	2/25/2024	7
Birds at Patuxent Research Refuge-South Tract	3/17/2024	11
Spring Wildflowers at Watkins Park	3/24/2024	6
Stewardship outing: City of District Heights Invasive Species Removal C Clean-up	4/20/2024	5
City Nature Challenge - Jug Bay Natural Area	4/27/2024	7
City Nature Challenge - Watkins Park	4/28/2024	7
Mountain Laurel at Jug Bay Natural Area	5//28/2024	14
Forest Trail at Patuxent Research Refuge-North Tract	7/13/2024	6
Walk Along Henson Creek	9/29/2024	8
Explore Jug Bay Wetland Sanctuary	10/27/2024	10
Explore Jug Bay Natural Area	11/30/2024	15

SUMMER PICNIC AND AWARDS

Our biggest social event of the year was a potluck picnic at Watkins Regional Park on August 25. Attendees got to experience a close encounter with some electric vehicles and get their questions answered by EV users at an EVs-in-the-park demonstration and also played a cooperative game about climate change. We celebrated the presentation of the [Prince](#)



[George's Sierra Club Environmental Service Award](#) to School Board Member Pamela Boozer-Strother for her outstanding work on the development and implementation of the Prince George's County Public Schools Climate Change Action Plan and the presentation of the Remarkable Achievement Award to longtime-activist Anne Riley for her work to establish a composting program in her retirement community.



ECOACTION ART CONTEST



To engage more families in thinking about climate solutions, PGSC continued its partnership with the Prince George's County Public Schools' William S. Schmidt Outdoor Education Center in sponsoring the 3rd Annual EcoAction Art Contest, "Climate Change: My Footprint Matters." Student works highlighted the importance of energy efficiency, composting, electrification, developing a re-use economy, connecting with nature, and individual responsibility. A PGSC representative served on the panel of judges reviewing student entries and presented PGSC-funded awards to winners.

ZERO WASTE TEAM – COLLECTING DATA FOR ADVOCACY

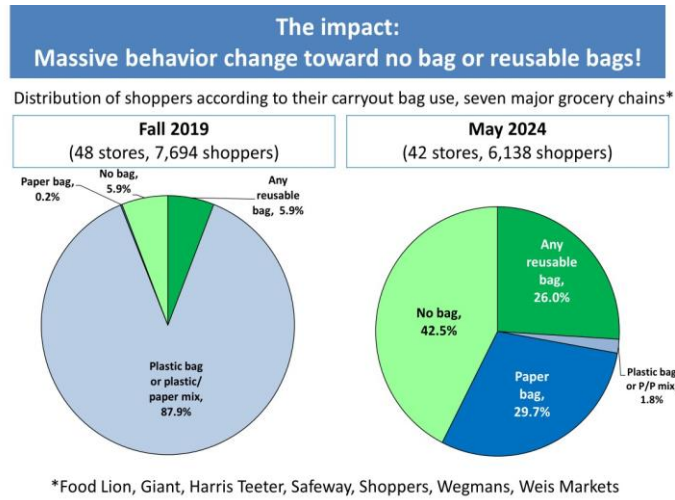
The Prince George's Group's Zero Waste Team is comprised of about 60 members and supporters who meet monthly throughout the year, focusing in 2024 on the rollout and implementation of the County's carryout bag ordinance, generating local support among municipalities and environmental groups for a statewide beverage container deposit legislation to reduce litter, and education of members and the public on zero waste themes. The Team has also been active in promoting the expansion of municipal food scrap collection and documenting the installation and removal of synthetic turf playing fields. It has strong links to the County's Solid Waste Advisory Commission and, in the past 3 years, has been working with municipal Green Teams and environmental advisory groups to strengthen zero waste policies in the County's 27 municipalities.

Rollout and defense of the Better Bag Bill

The County Council passed the Better Bag Bill (a ban on plastic carryout bags coupled with a minimum 10-cent charge for paper carryout bags) in 2023, which went into effect in January 2024. The Zero Waste Team continued to be involved in the rollout and successful implementation throughout the year, monitoring compliance by the retailers, meeting with County inspectors to ensure a common understanding of compliant reusable bags, documenting the impact, and successfully defending it against an attempt to remove the paper bag charge.

Anticipating that there would be an attempt to weaken the bill, 25 volunteers conducted a county-wide observational survey of 8,674 shoppers' bag use as the shoppers exited a total of 68 grocery stores, including all 42 stores in seven major grocery chains, all 20 Aldi and Lidl stores, and six international grocery chains. The survey was conducted five months into implementation (in May 2024), and when compared with results from the same stores surveyed in 2019, revealed a stunning change in shopper and store behavior! The share of grocery shoppers using plastic carryout bags was nearly eliminated, and the share of bringing a bag or not taking a bag rose from 12% in 2019 to 69% in 2024!

The decision to conduct the shopper survey before the summer proved to be critical, as in June 2024, a County Council member introduced a bill that would have removed the 10-cent charge for paper bags, removing the financial incentive for bringing a bag or not taking one. The bill also would have exempted restaurants from the plastic carryout bag ban. The Team promptly sent individualized emails to each County Council member documenting overall results in each members' district. There was a briefing for Group members on the results and the consequences of removing the bag charge. Additional briefings were offered to a half dozen municipal Green Teams. As a result, the bill sponsor held the bill until the fall, but has not been able to secure enough support on the Council for passage. It remains active but, as of December, has not appeared on any committee agenda.



Generating local support for the Maryland Bottle Bill

About 5.5 billion beverage containers are sold in Maryland annually, but only a quarter are captured for recycling. More than 4 billion containers annually are sent into the environment (in trash or as litter) or incinerated. Beverage container deposit programs (“bottle bills”) are the most effective policy in existence for reducing beverage container litter. By putting a refundable deposit on empty beverage containers, they are less likely to be trashed or littered and more likely to be collected from the environment to get the refund. A Maryland Bottle Bill has been introduced in the General Assembly, but there’s little chance of it passing unless local governments (municipalities and counties) express strong support.

In 2024, the PGSC Zero Waste Team took action to: demonstrate locally the large volume of litter that is beverage containers; calculate the tipping fee savings to municipalities from diversion of beverage containers from trash and recycling streams; and brief and secure support from the Solid Waste Advisory Committee, County Council members, and municipalities.

At two County clean-ups, the Team was able to demonstrate that beverage container litter by volume comprised roughly half of land-based litter (in District Heights) and about three-quarters of floating litter in the Anacostia (in an Anacostia Watershed Society trash trap sort in Bladensburg).





To demonstrate the potential savings to municipalities of a bottle bill (in which producers pay for the capture and recycling of up to 90% of used beverage containers), team members obtained trash and recycling tonnage from five municipalities. Analysis of waste characterization studies at the County landfill and the recycling facility revealed that 6.4% of trash tonnage and 27.1% of residential curbside collections by weight are beverage containers that would be included in a bottle bill. Using those coefficients, municipal tonnages, and prevailing tipping fees, the Team estimated the annual savings in tipping fees with a 90% recovery rate for beverage containers in the program: Bowie (\$109,358); Laurel (\$28,832); New Carrollton (\$21,279); Greenbelt (\$9,981); and Mt. Rainier (\$5,633).

During the 2024 General Assembly, the Team mobilized written testimony in support of the Maryland Bottle Bill from Brentwood, College Park, Greenbelt, Riverdale Park, and the Solid Waste Advisory Commission. Council member Wala Blegay traveled to Annapolis and forcefully testified before the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee. Since then, the Team has briefed more than a dozen municipalities on the bill – directly and with the support of their Green Teams, highlighting the reduction in litter and cost savings. We anticipate that most of the 27 municipalities will sign on in support of the Bottle Bill in 2025, which will also help the County to arrive at a position of support.

TABLING EVENTS

In 2024, the Prince George's Sierra Club participated in the following community events by providing informational materials and engaging with the public. A hands-on activity about what can and cannot be recycled at our Materials Recycling Facility proved particularly engaging.

- Earth Festival Riderwood, Laurel, April 19
- Student Environmental Alliance Summit, Bowie State University, April 29
- Greenman Festival, Greenbelt, May 13-14
- District Heights Day, June 1, 2024
- BowieFest, Allen Pond Park, Bowie, June 3
- Meadow Day, University Park, July 13
- Sustainable Saturday, Laurel, August 12
- Prince George's County Green Summit, Driskell Park, Hyattsville, October 19
- Bowie Veterans 5K, Bowie Town Center, November 4