



December 23, 2015

Dear Ms. Plank:

We are submitting these comments on behalf of the approximately 5,000 members of the Montgomery County Sierra Club in response to the proposal of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to host ground-based solar at three locations in the next year.

We applaud the MCPS for its efforts to expand reliance on solar energy. These efforts are all the more important, given that Montgomery County now needs to reduce emissions by about 25% between now and 2020 to meet its public commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Public schools can contribute substantially to the County's transition to clean energy. Like all users of large buildings, schools consume considerable energy, which, if based on fossil fuels, contributes to climate change. But, in addition to reducing their carbon footprint, schools can model sustainable behaviors and values for the next generation. Not only should schools teach students about clean energy, they need to demonstrate the real-world feasibility of relying on clean energy and the civic responsibility for making the transition.

The latest proposal of the MCPS to host ground-based solar would enormously expand available solar energy for the public schools. One of the largest sites, Warfield Road, with an estimated capacity of 2.67 MW, would remove about 2.5 thousand tons of CO₂ annually from the atmosphere or the equivalent of taking 530 cars off the road. This site would host a solar project equivalent to rooftop solar on more than a dozen schools. Sierra Club Montgomery County strongly supports the proposals for ground-based solar at the Warfield and Cashell Road sites.

The site at Brickyard Road raises unique issues. This site was the focus of a controversy over whether to continue leasing the land as an organic educational farm or convert it to soccer fields. The Sierra Club publicly opposed Brickyard's conversion to soccer fields, supporting the organic farm. Some members of the Sierra Club continue to favor using the land as an organic educational farm, while others support using the site to expand clean energy for the schools. In the face of these differing views, both reflecting laudable values, the Sierra Club Montgomery County takes no position on the Brickyard site.

In sum, we urge the MCPS to expand its reliance on clean energy in public schools. We specifically support adopting the MCPS's proposal for the Warfield and Cashell Road sites. We further urge the MCPS to explore additional ways to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, including through installing more solar on roofs, and to offer sustainable models for students and the wider community.

Sincerely,

David Sears, Chair

Michal Freedman, Vice Chair

Montgomery County Sierra Club, Executive Committee