

CECAP Update – September 2020 Great Falls Group Newsletter

By Brian Castelli, Sierra Club representative to the CECAP Task Force

The Fairfax County Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) work of the Task Force and Focus Groups continued as a virtual electronic meeting of both groups took place on July 29, 2020. While not as satisfying as a person to person meeting where member interactions would be more numerous and robust, it nonetheless provided a good forum to discuss and determine the myriad decisions needed to be made on the goals and other critical issues for the CECAP.

As the Sierra Club representative to the CECAP, I talked with some of our Sierra Club members who are in the focus groups, or represent a constituency on the task force and some of our allies on the task force (though only one-on-one since we are not allowed to engage in group discussions per Fairfax County/FOIA rules on public meetings). We generally agreed on pressing forward with many of the following points noted below. I believe these points provide a solid base for Sierra Club advocacy for strong and implementable policies and programs embodied in the aforementioned points. They may also be used as a resource for our members who will:

1. Participate in one or all of the three virtual information sessions here (please review our [talking points](#) on the goals):

[Thursday, August 27, 7 to 9 p.m.](#)

[Tuesday, September 1, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.](#)

[Wednesday, September 2, 7 to 9 p.m.](#)

2. Respond to the CECAP's public survey at <https://bit.ly/3fW2cn8> which will be released on August 27 (and is to be completed by September 13). At the bottom of the talking points document, you can access a link to a compendium of GFG generated strategies, policies, measures, etc. related to meeting the goals of CECAP. These documents will be updated as information becomes available.

Determinations and some thoughts resulting from the virtual July 29 CECAP meeting are as follows:

- **Base year:** At the Task Force meeting of July 29,2020, members agreed that the 2005 year is an appropriate or popular choice by many climate organizations to compare current and future emissions to (2005 is the year when US emissions peaked); however, this means that goals selected in the future will be more easily attainable as compared to any other later year with lower emissions. Not an aggressive policy choice to solve the climate crisis, therefore a later year would be preferable.
- **Attainable versus aspiration goals:** Consensus was attainable goals should be set in the short term and aspirational goals were more appropriate for the longer term.
- **Scenarios for deeper analysis:** There were five Scenarios presented in a survey to Task Force/Focus Group members in which members/liaisons were asked to select from (defined as Scenarios A, B, C, D, and E). Scenario A was least stringent (in setting climate goals) and Scenario E (requiring an 80% decrease in Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) by 2050) was the most stringent. Consensus among the task force members was that Scenarios A through D were not stringent enough, so Scenario E or a more stringent scenario would be appropriate to consider. I strongly promoted a more stringent scenario (than any of the five presented) to the Task Force.
- **New Scenarios:** Task Force staff then presented two new Scenarios E+ (which would require an 87% decrease in Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2050), and Carbon Neutral (same as Net Zero) which balances carbon emissions with carbon removal (often through carbon offsetting by adding renewable energy, planting trees, etc.) Take note that Carbon Neutral/Net Zero is different from Zero Carbon which means no new carbon emitted. Consensus was that E+ and Carbon Neutral scenarios are more appropriate. (NOTE: the introduction of the two new scenarios became problematic as a number of members indicated that they would be unable to vote at this time as they would have to vet these new scenarios with their respective groups first). A number of Sierra Club members agreed that the Scenarios E+ was a superior approach for Fairfax County to pursue in the reduction of GHGs.

§ NOTE: the above two bullets were not presented with specific actionable policies or programs to reduce GHGs, but only with the ultimate goals which ICF and others could then model and then identify the types of policies and programs needed to achieve the stated goals of the scenarios. We are not yet at the stage where specific GHG reduction policies/programs are being identified (though you can review a [draft](#) of the Sierra Club document entitled “*Potential*

*Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Strategies” for Fairfax County
CECAP..*

- **Target goal year:** Consensus of the Task Force was that 2050 is appropriate. We supported that target goal year.
- **Interim goal year:** 2025 and 2030 were the consensus choice of the members/liaisons. We strongly supported regular documentation of the progress toward those goals during the five-year periods.
- **Sector specific goals:** The consensus top three sectors were buildings, renewable energy, and transportation (energy efficiency, county government, and waste were less popular). However, it was noted that energy efficiency is the major method in decreasing building GHG emissions, and we supported combining both. Therefore, we supported:

§ prioritizing energy efficiency programs and incentives in all sectors.

§ tracking progress and refining strategies through Sector-specific goals (a critical means to measure and report on progress of achieving goals.

§ establishing job training/retraining programs for green jobs in the energy efficiency sector.

- **Goal Policy response:** We stressed the importance of absolute and attainable goals, as opposed to aspirational or intensity/per capita based goals. The latter type of goals does not ensure that any specific GHG reduction target would be achieved. For example, energy intensity goals can allow energy use (and emissions therefrom) to increase while an intensity target can still be met (e.g. a building can add floor space (and energy use) while still meeting the original kWh/ft² target).
- **County Leadership:** The OEEC should adopt a CECAP that would be seen as a world class program by global climate leaders - Fairfax County should be “best in class” of all counties. (County staff and consultants had reviewed approximately 40 city and county climate action plans; Fairfax County’s CECAP should be designed to be the most stringent in GHG reductions.)
- **Low Income and Social Justice:** We strongly support clean energy and environmental policies and programs for Title I schools and low-income families. We further support the county providing some incentives or mitigation for low income families. (For example, in the near term, a federal subsidy could meet that need, where in the longer term, county changes in zoning, building codes,

and affordable housing could help support the effort.) Further, in order to ensure equity and racial justice in the development of the climate action plan, goals and actions must be developed for low income people and communities of color in line with the County's One Fairfax policy framework.

- **Benefit/Cost Analyses:** There are myriad ways in which implementation of an aggressive GHG reduction program may yield large financial benefits, in terms of reduced health issues, for example, or creation of additional jobs, or opportunities to build something new and different.

In addition, there are non-energy benefits such as the climate for wildlife, our own comfort, etc.

There is also a cost associated with not doing anything. Not only does the air get worse, but increased severity of storm related damage, flooding will result in losses to property, increased cost of insurance, etc. Sierra Club members strongly support requiring all benefit/cost analyses include financial benefits attributable to external or indirect benefits that GHG reductions result in, so as to blunt the arguments of those who only discuss the costs of climate actions.

Next steps:

1. August 27 and September 1 and 2, 2020: three public meetings with an online survey open from August 27 through September 13. **Sierra Club members should participate in the meetings and respond to the Survey.** (The survey will be available at <https://bit.ly/3fW2cn8> after August 27; you may also get information for the three public meetings at this link.)
2. September 2020: OEEC staff will collate and distribute public feedback with a Task Force meeting on September 30 to discuss the public feedback and strategies to meet the County's climate/CECAP goals.

More to report on after our busy September.