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June 1, 2023

Takis Karantonis, Chair, Climate, Energy and Environment Policy Committee (CEEPC)
CEEPC Committee Members
777 North Capitol St. N.E.
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Chairman Karantonis and CEEPC members:

Thank you very much for discussing my comments during your meeting on Wednesday, May 24, 2023. I am particularly thankful for the interest in my letter expressed by the Chair and the potential opportunity to provide additional information during the next CEEPC meeting.

I am writing today to provide the committee with some ideas on what the climate change goals for an affluent ... and politically and technically savvy area like the Metropolitan Washington region might look like. My ideas are based upon my experience as part of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change before I retired, recent discussions with Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN), past participation as President and a Board member for the National Association of Clean Air Agencies (NACAA) and research on the issue of climate change goals.

Again, as background, my name is Tad Aburn. Last year I was the Chair of the MWAQC Technical Advisory Committee. I was an MWAQC member for over 10 years. For almost 20 years I was the director of the air pollution program in Maryland. During my time at the Maryland Department of the Environment, I was lead staff to the State's Climate Change Commission and the Commission's Mitigation Working Group. I have an environmental engineering degree from Brown University. I am now retired and writing today as a volunteer for several environmentally overburdened communities in Prince George's County and as a member of the general public. A policy oriented high level summary of my thoughts are provided below and also attached as a stand-alone.

High Level Summary of Potential Updates to MWWCOG Climate Change Goals

Introduction

The science behind climate change has evolved very rapidly. With almost every update to the science, policy makers are acknowledging that there is a significant increase in the sense of urgency associated with reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions needed to accelerate the progress needed to address climate change.

Current Goals

Current regional goals adopted by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWWCOG) are:

- A 50% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 from a 2005 base year. This initial target is complemented by a longer term goal
- 80% GHG emission reduction by 2050

These goals are being implemented as somewhat mandatory targets.

Suggested Update to Current Goals

This suggested update would be consistent with the most recent science and the goals being used in other leadership areas like California, New York and Maryland.

Mandatory Goals/Targets

- 60% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030,
- Net-zero GHG emissions by 2045. Net-zero would be achieved by implementing both emission reduction programs and initiatives to sequester carbon (carbon sinks) like urban tree canopy efforts.

Complementary Aspirational or Stretch Goals

This concept is new for the MWWCOG region. It is based upon the international policy discussions that push for affluent ... and politically and technically savvy areas like the Metropolitan Washington area to adopt stretch goals that could be achieved if technology and public opinion and behavior evolve very quickly.

- 65% reduction in GHG emissions by 2028 to 2030,
- 20% “beyond net-zero” by 2040 to 2045

The above summary is intended to be very simple. Policy and technical support documents are available and probably already being considered by the MWCOG staff. I have also submitted several earlier letters to TPB, MWAQC and other Committees at MWCOG. These letters provide additional information on this issue and are available from MWCOG staff.

There is a true sense of urgency associated with the need to update the region's climate change goals. The science is clear ... deeper and faster GHG reductions are critical. There is also an issue specific to the MWCOG region that adds to that urgency. The most significant contributors to the region's GHG emissions are mobile sources and other transportation related emission sources. The MWCOG Transportation Planning Board (TPB) is currently developing and implementing a plan to reduce GHG emissions. Transportation strategies are often very expensive, are sometimes irreversible and often take years to phase in emission reductions. Because of this, having the right goals and timing is absolutely imperative. At a minimum, TPB needs to make sure that their GHG emission reduction plan can easily be adapted should much deeper and earlier emission reductions be needed.

At their May 24, 2023 meeting, the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) voted unanimously to expeditiously develop and adopt a regional environmental justice plan. I have provided comments to MWAQC on a proposed environmental justice framework consistent with the positive action taken by MWAQC on the 24th. A copy of those comments, dated June 1, 2023, is attached.

In closing, I would like to thank you again for allowing public input and participation as part of the CEEPC process. I still believe that there should be a routine opportunity for public comment as part of all CEEPC meetings. I would be happy to discuss the high level summary of updated climate change goals during a future meeting or with a smaller group of CEEPC and MWCOG leadership.

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cc (to be distributed to MWCOG members by MWCOG staff):
CEEPC Committee Members

Kate Stewart, Chair, MWCOG BOD
Anita Bonds, Chair, MWAQC
Tom Dernoga, Vice Chair, MWAQC
Reuben Collins, Chair, TPB
Anne Havemann, CCAN
Dr. Sacoby Wilson, UMCP CEEJH

Attachment 1 - High Level Summary of Potential Updates to MWCOG Regional Climate Change Goals - June 1

Introduction

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¹ This high level summary was drafted by Tad Aburn. Mr. Aburn worked for 40 years for the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), was the MDE Air Director and a member of MWAQC for over 10 years, chaired MWAQC TAC multiple times and played a key role at MDE in staffing the State's Climate Change Commission. Mr Aburn has recently retired and is doing volunteer work for several overburdened communities in Maryland.