

ENVIRONMENT

Maryland Democrats Pass Climate Bill After Years of Setbacks

By STEPHEN NEUKAM
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 31, 2022)—Sweeping climate change legislation won final passage through the Maryland Senate Thursday (March 31), sending the bill to Republican Gov. Larry Hogan's desk in time for legislators to override his anticipated veto.

The bill, which aims to significantly curtail the state's greenhouse gas emissions and sets it on a path for net zero emissions by 2045, cleared the legislature on a party-line vote, 32 to 15, after months of negotiations between Democratic environmental champions in both chambers.

It is a product of three years worth of efforts to pass the Climate Solutions Now Act, after previous versions failed in 2020 and 2021.

Sen. Paul Pinsky, D-Prince George's, and Del. Kumar Barve, D-Montgomery, led the bill through the legislature this session and came to an agreement over changes made to the proposed law in the House, a stumbling block that prevented the bill from passing last year.

Democrats worked to get the bill to Hogan by the end of this week in time to override a possible veto from the Republican executive.

Democrats expect Hogan, who blasted the legislation earlier this month as an "energy tax bill," to veto the legislation, legislators and aides said.

"(It) imposes massive burdens on Maryland families and small businesses," Hogan said in a statement March 10. "With inflation surging and energy prices at record highs,

this is the absolute worst possible time for policies that raise costs for consumers."

The bill calls for a 60% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2031. The bill also mandates that existing buildings over 35,000 square feet reduce emissions by 20% by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2040. Single family homes, historic properties, manufacturing buildings and agricultural buildings would be excluded from the new standards.

Regulations for new buildings, methane emissions monitoring and a program for the construction of net zero emission schools, among other measures, were stripped from the bill in a compromise between Senate and House Democrats. Pinsky criticized the changes made by his colleagues in the House of Delegates.

"When we sent over this consensus bill... we had hoped that the other chamber would take it up also in seriousness and boldness, but unfortunately there was some level of retreat and conciliation to the fossil fuel industry and some other interests," Pinsky said on the Senate floor Wednesday.

Barve was disappointed in Pinsky's comments, saying in an interview with Capital News Service after Thursday's vote that he and Pinsky were in constant communication about the bill during negotiations this session.

Barve pointed out that the House amended a proposed study of the state's electric grid capacity to accommodate an all-electric building code by removing gas infrastructure from the study completely and moving up the reporting date for the study to September 2023 from 2025.

The Senate version of the bill included

examining how gas companies would fare under a transition to an electrified building sector in the study, which the House removed.

"Paul Pinsky chose to cave to BGE (Baltimore Gas and Electric Company)," Barve said.

Barve also said there was never an agreement between Pinsky and him to include the construction of net zero schools, which the Senate bill included in "bad faith," he said, and the House removed.

Despite their disagreements, Barve said he was pleased with the finished product that cleared both chambers.

"This was two, two and a half years worth of work," Barve said. "We are really, really proud of an excellent bill."

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a leading environmental group in the state which lobbied heavily for the bill, commended the bill's passage.

"This legislation puts the state on a path toward decarbonization and will reduce Maryland's overall greenhouse gas emissions over the next 20 years," CBF Maryland Executive Director Josh Kurtz said in a statement Tuesday. "We owe it to future generations of Marylanders to address the root causes of the stronger storms, rising sea levels, and higher temperatures that threaten their quality of life, and this bill is a strong step toward doing so.

"CBF thanks House leadership and the delegates who helped defend this bill against several weakening amendments."

Senate Minority Leader Bryan Simonaire, R-Anne Arundel, criticized the legislation as a "partisan bill" that passed by "a party-line vote" before final passage Thursday.

Spotlight

UMES Geoscience Bridge Program Provides a Leg-up for High School Seniors



PHOTO COURTESY UMES

UMES Geoscience Bridge Program students

By GAIL STEPHENS

University of Maryland Eastern Shore

PRINCESS ANNE, Md. (April 1, 2022)—The University of Maryland Eastern Shore is accepting applications for its summer 2022 Geoscience Bridge Program, June 27–August 5—a paid internship opportunity. High school seniors can learn about ocean and atmospheric sciences using geographic information systems and Remote Sensing technologies before their freshman year of college.

Funded by the NOAA Living Marine Resources Cooperative Science Center at UMES, the program aims to prepare students, particularly from underrepresented groups, for successfully transitioning to college life. Lectures, field trips, hands-on activities, a one-for-credit college math course and weekly seminars on college-prep topics round out the program.

After one-year as a virtual program due to the pandemic, the Geoscience Bridge Program returned to an in-person experience last summer hosting eight high school students from across the country and from as far as Puerto Rico. Summer interns receive a stipend, housing, meals and roundtrip travel expenses to attend.

Visit www.wcp.umes.edu/geosciences/ by April 22 to apply. For more information on UMES' Geoscience Summer Bridge Program, email cascott@umes.edu.

Solar Co-op Launched April 1 for DMV-Area Residents to Go Solar Together

Northern Virginia, neighboring Maryland counties, and the District of Columbia will all go solar as a community

By PRESS OFFICER

Solar United Neighbors (SUN)

WASHINGTON (March 30, 2022)—On Friday, April 1, nonprofit group Solar United Neighbors (SUN) launch[ed] the second Capital Area Solar Co-op to help DMV area residents go solar. In 2021, SUN hosted its first Capital Area Solar Co-op covering Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. as a result, 255 homes and businesses installed solar panels and 51 installed electric vehicle chargers. This resulted in 2,344 kW of solar capacity, \$5.4 million in local solar spending, and more than 55.4 million pounds of lifetime carbon offsets.

"Solar United Neighbors is thrilled to bring back this popular solar co-op to the Capital Area that helped more than 250 residents and businesses go solar in 2021," said Aaron Sutch, Mid-Atlantic program director for Solar United Neighbors. "Together, we're building a movement to transform our electricity system into one that is cleaner, fairer, and shares its benefits more broadly."

The co-op is free to join and open to homeowners and business owners in Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Montgomery, Prince George's, and Frederick Counties in Maryland. There will be three different projects based by state. Together, co-op members will learn about solar energy and leverage their numbers to purchase individual solar systems at a competitive price and top quality.

After a competitive bidding process facilitated by SUN, which remains vendor neutral, co-op members will select a single solar company in each state (or district) to complete the installations. Joining the co-op does not obligate members to purchase solar. In-

stead, members will have the option to individually purchase panels, electric vehicle chargers, and storage based on the installer's group rate.

Solar United Neighbors is partnering with groups across the DMV to promote the co-ops. Partners include: Arlington County, City of Falls Church, DC Department of Energy and Environment, Montgomery County Green Bank, One Montgomery Green, Montgomery Energy Connection, Montgomery County, MD Department of Environmental Protection, Sustainable Frederick County, Town of Poolesville, Poolesville Green, City of Bowie, City of Gaithersburg, City of Rockville, Sustainable Takoma Park, City of Frederick, City of Laurel, and the City of Takoma Park.

"We're excited to announce the second round of the Capital Area Solar Co-op that helps make solar accessible and affordable for Montgomery County residents," said Adriana Hochberg, acting director for the Montgomery County, MD Department of Environmental Protection. "This is a great opportunity to educate residents about the benefits of switching to clean energy and lowering their utility costs. Through a solar co-op, our neighbors are empowered to take control of their electricity bills and use the cost-savings to invest in a better quality of life."

In addition to the co-op being open to all Montgomery County, MD residents, special financing options will be available to assist all income qualifying residents through the Montgomery County Green Bank.

SUN and the co-op partners will host monthly free information sessions virtually and in person to educate community members about solar energy and the co-op. Individuals interested in going solar can attend

an upcoming information session (preliminary list below) and/or sign up for the co-op sessions at solarunitedneighbors.org/capitalarea.

Information meetings are planned by Zoom webinar for:

Tuesday, April 12, 12 p.m. Virginia Info Session

Tuesday, May 10, 6 p.m. Virginia Info Session

Thursday, May 12, 6 p.m. Maryland Info Session

Wednesday, June 8, 12 p.m. Virginia Info Session

Friday, June 10, 12 p.m. DC Info Session

Friday, June 17, 12 p.m. Maryland Info Session featuring Green Bank

Tuesday, July 12, 6 p.m. Virginia Info Session

Saturday, July 16, 6 p.m. Maryland Info Session

Thursday, August 18, 12 p.m. Maryland Info Session

Tuesday, August 23, 12 p.m. Virginia Info Session

For continued co-op updates and event information, visit the state-affiliated co-op website. Solar co-op member interviews are available upon request.

Solar United Neighbors is a nonprofit organization that works in the DMV and nationwide to represent the needs and interests of solar owners and supporters. Solar co-ops are part of the organization's mission to create a new energy system with rooftop solar at the cornerstone. Solar United Neighbors holds events and education programs to help people become informed solar consumers, maximize the value of their solar investment, and advocate for fair solar policies.

Protect Local Waterways by Following Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law

By PRESS OFFICER

Maryland Department of Agriculture

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 31, 2022)—The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) reminds homeowners to follow Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law while doing yard work this spring. Fertilizer products containing nitrogen and phosphorus may be applied to lawns beginning March 1 as long as the ground is not hard frozen or snow-covered, and heavy rain is not expected.

Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law is designed to prevent excess nutrients from entering the Chesapeake Bay and local waterways. The law requires both lawn care professionals and those that care for their own lawns to obey fertilizer application restrictions, use best management practices when applying fertilizer to lawns, observe fertilizer blackout dates, and follow the University of Maryland Extension's (UME) fertilizer recommendations.

Additionally, lawn care professionals

are required to be licensed and certified by MDA to apply fertilizer, or they must work under the direct supervision of an individual who is certified. A list of MDA-certified lawn care professionals can be found on the department's website. These individuals have been trained in bay-friendly fertilizer techniques.

If you care for your own lawn, follow these best management practices:

- Skip the spring fertilizer, especially if your lawn is healthy. Fall is the best time to fertilize cool-season grasses like fescues and Kentucky bluegrass.
- Sharpen lawnmower blades. A dull blade tears and weakens the grass, opening it up to disease. Many local

hardware stores or garden shops can sharpen your blade for you.

- Raise the cutting height of the mower. Taller grass shades out weeds and needs less water. A three-inch cut length is ideal for most lawns.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn. They provide free fertilizer all season long.

Get your soil tested to see if your grass will benefit from additional nutrients or lime. Watch a UME video on how to take a soil test.

If you decide to fertilize:

- Always follow the directions on the fertilizer bag.
- Do not apply phosphorus (indicated by

the middle number on the fertilizer bag) to lawns unless a soil test shows that it is needed.

- Clean up any fertilizer on sidewalks or other impervious surfaces.
- Keep fertilizer applications 10 to 15 feet away from waterways.
- Do not apply fertilizer if heavy rain is expected.

For more information on Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law and fertilizer best management practices, please visit MDA's website. For lawn fertilizer recommendations and additional tips, please visit the UME Home and Garden Information Center's website: <https://extension.umd.edu>.