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Progress Noted in Howard County’s 2015 Climate Action Plan, Challenges with Transportation and Long-Term Goals

Ellicott City, MD (January 11, 2016) – On the heels of December’s Paris Climate Change Conference, representatives of the Howard County Office of Community Sustainability, the Environmental Sustainability Board, and the Energy Task Force updated the County Council, at its monthly meeting, on the 2015 Climate Action Plan, as well as recent activities from the Task Force and the formation of an Energy Subcabinet.

Over the last several years, Howard County has begun the process of inventorying its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and implementing efforts to reduce its carbon footprint through the year 2050. By employing an array of sustainability and energy strategies and actions, the County continues to achieve or exceed its goals, but will need to re-evaluate future projects to continue the success until 2050. Currently, the strategies in reducing emissions include energy use in buildings, transportation systems and renewable energy development.

“Even though we have seen progress in some areas, we cannot simply continue along the same path to accomplish our long-term emission reduction goals,” said Council Chairperson Calvin Ball. “Howard County should be a model for the role local governments can play in fighting climate change. We must make emission reductions a priority in all aspects of County operations.”

Laura A.T. Miller, Project Manager for the Howard County Office of Community Sustainability, compared the findings of the 2010 Climate Action Plan to the 2015 Climate Action Plan. “While many of the goals set forth in the original Climate Action Plan were met if not exceeded, the transportation sector lagged behind. Increases in mobile fuel usage in internal County operations, as well as in contracted services, need to be more fully investigated with the goal of creating fuel efficiencies that both decrease GHG emissions and overall fuel costs.”

In 2007, Howard County became the second county in the country to sign the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Since that time, numerous projects have helped reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including a gas to energy project; improvements to the landfill gas collection system; food waste composting; efforts at the waste water treatment plant; solar installations; and phase one of an energy performance contract.

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Over the next few years, more data will be available from the second phase of the energy performance contract. The Plan recommends that the County focus on converting additional fuel oil boilers to natural gas, reducing transportation fuel usage, adding more solar panels, improving waste collection systems, increasing composting, and working with the waste water treatment plant to keep GHG emissions as low as possible.

Miller did note that there was significant progress with the Howard County Public School System and its overall reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Councilperson Greg Fox attributed the improvements to the school system's own energy performance contracts and strong leadership in its energy department.

Jim Caldwell, Administrator of the Howard County Office of Community Sustainability, summed up the discussion emphasizing that the Climate Action Plan is not a static document, but rather that it should be updated regularly to gauge progress and incorporate new technologies.

***To watch the video from this monthly meeting, visit
<http://cc.howardcountymd.gov/Online-Tools/Watch-Us>***

***To view a copy of the Howard County 2015 Climate Action Plan, visit
http://livegreenhoward.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/HCM_2015_Climate-Action-Plan_Sep2015_eversion.pdf***

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