

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

TO: Chair Danielle McCray, Health, Environment and Technology Committee, Baltimore City Council
FROM: Andrea van Wyk, The Nature Conservancy, Baltimore Community Project Manager; Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst
POSITION: Support with Amendments Council Bill 21-0161 – City Operations – Net Zero Emissions of Greenhouse Gases

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports with amendments Council Bill 21-0161 offered by Councilman Conway. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. TNC has an institutional goal to help to reduce emissions by avoiding or sequestering 3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide per year by 2030. We are dedicated to a future where people and nature thrive together.

Council Bill 21-0161 seeks to set Baltimore's emissions reduction goal to net-zero greenhouse gases by 2050. This presents us with an opportunity to demonstrate our city's ambition and commitment when it comes to approaching climate change head-on. In addition to setting overall city goals, this bill establishes a Sustainability and Environmental Management Program and directs creating a Comprehensive Sustainability plan to develop, implement and coordinate projects and policies that will progress the city-wide emissions goal. TNC, alongside Bluewater Baltimore, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the National Aquarium, supports Council Bill 21-0161 with the attached amendments. These amendments include provisions that will make Council Bill 21-0161 more ambitious, equitable and transparent.

The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) paints a vivid picture of the climate emergency's real-world impacts and maps out repercussions for humans and nature if climate trends continue. In order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, which are already compounding extremes across the globe, we must take bold and immediate actions to reduce carbon emissions. Global leaders have agreed that net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 is a planetary imperative. This is no small feat and will require a range of solutions applied together to reach the goal, including transitioning our economy away from carbon-emitting fossil fuels, increasing our clean energy sources' use, harnessing nature's power to capture carbon, and deploying scientifically proven technologies that capture and store carbon. TNC has led on science that demonstrates Natural Climate Solutions have the potential to contribute up to a third of the climate mitigation that the Paris Agreement indicates is needed by 2030 and are thus an essential component of responding to the climate crisis.

Around the globe, many of the people who are impacted first and most severely by climate change have contributed far less to increasing carbon emissions. In cities, the IPCC reports that some aspects of climate change may be amplified, "including heat, flooding from heavy precipitation events and sea level rise in coastal

cities.” Furthermore, the report confirmed with high confidence that these environmental impacts and severe weather hazards have “contributed to cascading effects of infrastructure damage, loss of services and economic activity, damage to heritage resources, safety concerns and disrupted livelihoods.” In coastal cities like Baltimore, the IPCC also found with high confidence that “urban flooding affecting communities and ecosystems will become a dominant risk to urban centers, displacing people, compromising economic activity, disrupting transportation and trade infrastructure.” Making transformative changes to reduce emissions in Baltimore will not only mitigate these threats as well as help meet global emissions reduction goals but will also positively impact neighborhoods that are currently facing elevated public health risks and concentrated poverty by reducing pollution, creating new job markets and building a more resilient city.

The City of Baltimore has set ambitious, yet necessary, goals to mitigate global climate change through the 2019 Baltimore Sustainability Plan. In order to stay on track to meet upcoming 2030 and 2050 City targets, leadership across Baltimore needs to commit to taking immediate action and enacting strategies to meet these carbon neutral goals. We commend Councilman Conway for introducing Council Bill 21-0161, and Councilmembers Dorsey, Porter, Bullock, Middleton, Burnett, Cohen, Ramos and Glover for cosponsoring this bill, which would promote public health and safety, mitigate climate change and envision a greener future for Baltimore.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report with the attached amendments on Council Bill 21-0161.

Suggested Amendments for 21-0161

1. Move up the timeline to 2045 and bring in line with the Carbon Neutral City resolution by setting emission reduction goals of 30% by 2025 and 60% by 2030.
2. Change the definition of "net zero emissions" to limit the use of offsets. Here's suggested language based on [Austin's Climate Equity Plan](#):
 - a. "Net-zero emissions" means all human-made greenhouse gas emissions are removed from the atmosphere through direct reduction and the use of carbon offsets or carbon dioxide removal as needed. For any given year, carbon offsets cannot exceed more than 10% of the city's 2007 GHG emissions baseline level. This 10% should be reserved for sectors where emission reductions are cost-prohibitive or impossible to reduce with existing technology. When carbon offsets are used:
 - i. They should be purchased from projects as close to the Baltimore area as possible.
 - ii. They should be purchased from projects that create additional environmental and equity benefits.
 - iii. Carbon offsets from negative emissions should be prioritized over avoided emissions, and the use of avoided emissions should be phased out by 2040.
3. Add a definition of carbon offsets. Here's suggested language from Austin:
 - a. "Carbon offset" means one metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e) that is kept out of the atmosphere by either preventing the creation of the emissions ("avoided emissions") or sequestering carbon in vegetation, soils, rock, or water ("negative emissions"). The avoided or negative emissions occur outside of Baltimore and compensate for an equivalent amount of greenhouse gas emissions occurring within Baltimore.
4. Add parameters for what types of carbon offsets will be accepted. Here's suggested language, also from Austin:
 - a. "Carbon offsets must adhere to an approved accounting protocol that ensures the carbon offsets are additional, measurable and permanent, and do not create negative environmental or social impacts. The offsets must also be third-party verified and registered."
5. Ensure that building upgrades, capital investments, etc associated with this bill are implemented in the communities most impacted by climate change and pollution first. Suggested language:
 - a. On page 3, line 18 after "DEFINED IN CITY CODE ARTICLE 1, § 34-1(E);" add "WHILE ENSURING THAT BUILDING UPGRADES, CAPITAL INVESTMENTS, ETC ASSOCIATED WITH THE NET ZERO TRANSITION ARE PRIORITIZED TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE IN THE COMMUNITIES MOST IMPACTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLLUTION."
6. Require the use of key environmental justice indicators to track community environmental health impacts. Suggested language from the Initiative for Energy Justice and Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments:
 - a. On page 4, line 1 before "set criteria and recommend mandatory measures" add "(7) ESTABLISH KEY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INDICATORS TO TRACK COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF PLAN; AND (8)."
 - b. On page 4, line 5 after "Article 23, § 16-2; and" add "(III) COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH METRICS INCLUDING DECREASE IN METRIC TONS OF CRITERIA POLLUTANTS AND THE PARITY OR DISPARITY OF BENEFITS AND BURDENS ACROSS DIFFERENT POPULATIONS ; AND (IV)"

7. Assess any additional staffing needs required to implement this ordinance.
8. Require additional transparency and community-based public participation mechanisms to provide input and track progress of the net zero transition. Suggested language:
 - a. The Office shall develop rules and regulations to require additional transparency and community-based public participation mechanisms to provide input and track progress of the net zero transition.