



A legacy of regional cooperation, a commitment to a vibrant future

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 25, 2007

To: Climate Change Steering Committee

From: Stuart A. Freudberg, Director
Department of Environmental Programs

Subject: Outreach and Participation Options for Involving Stakeholders in the Work of the Climate Change Steering Committee

The Climate Change Steering Committee's overall charge is to assist the COG Board of Directors with the design and implementation of a regional climate change program. The Committee began its work in May, 2007 and is charged to complete its work program by April, 2008. At that time it is requested to recommend to the COG Board the need for a "long-term structure" for COG's Climate Change initiative.

The CCSC has a very ambitious work program that includes the following elements: preparing a catalogue of greenhouse gas reduction activities already underway, preparation of an emissions inventory and a possible reduction goal or target based on an appropriate baseline, identification of best practices, a method for tracking progress, examination of local impacts of climate change, examination of the feasibility of a carbon offset fund, recommendations on climate change policy, and development of information and outreach materials for elected officials and the general public.

In order to assist the CCSC with its work, various approaches for broadening participation and engaging experts are described below, along with a staff recommendation. It is understood that public outreach and involvement goes well beyond the areas listed below. However, for immediate consideration we have only focused on the areas identified below. Additional efforts will be later recommended in the context of a broader public outreach strategy.

At the CCSC meeting on September 26, 2007, members will be requested to consider these ideas and provide direction to staff for implementation.

*District of Columbia
Bladensburg*
Bowie
College Park
Frederick
Frederick County
Gaithersburg
Greenbelt
Montgomery County
Prince George's County
Rockville
Takoma Park
Alexandria
Arlington County
Fairfax
Fairfax County
Falls Church
Loudoun County
Manassas
Manassas Park
Prince William County
Adjunct member

1. Regional Climate Change Conference

There is an abundance of information and experiences on climate change and related activities to reduce green house gases throughout the region, including national and international organizations. A regional conference that includes very high caliber individuals and stakeholder organizations to share experiences, projects, management challenges, and visions of future trends and issues in order to instruct, improve, and enlighten would be of great benefit to COG and its members. Such a conference could be scheduled in March, 2008, and timed in advance of the committee issuing its report to the COG Board of Directors. It also could include elements related to Green Building and alternative energy/alternatively fueled vehicles, thereby combining several currently independent conference initiatives. Sponsorship/partnering with other organizations will be required to implement the conference.

Staff recommendation: Form a small conference planning committee and charge it to design a regional climate change conference and raise funds to support the effort. Set a target date of early March, 2008.

2. Invite Guest Speakers/Experts to Participate in Climate Change Steering Committee

The September 26, 2007 meeting includes participation by Professor Reid Ewing who will discuss his recent report on the relationship between Climate Change and patterns of growth and development. There are a number of other areas where a guest speaker/expert with practical application experience can assist the Committee deliberations on specific work program elements. For example, as the Committee evaluates options regarding identification of a target verses goal or selection of baseline years, an expert would be appropriate to share his or her experience in this area. The concerns regarding environmental impacts of climate change on our region would be another important topic for outside expert participation or a panel of experts. Staff would craft various questions and issues to be addressed by the expert in the context of the Committee's interests.

Staff recommendation: Staff works with Chair and other members to identify potential topics and experts to invite to future meetings.

3. Committee Work Sessions

The bi-monthly meeting frequency may not provide time for committee members to effectively cover the myriad of topics and information on climate change necessary for addressing its mission and charge. The possibility of holding one or more work sessions that could include outside stakeholder participation is one way of increasing knowledge of committee members and involving stakeholders in committee deliberations.

Staff recommendation: Identify one two-hour work session date, perhaps immediately preceding an upcoming meeting, and a specific focus for more in-depth consideration of key committee topics.

4. Public Comment

Both the Transportation Planning Board and the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee use a public comment period at the start of each meeting as a standing means to insure public participation in committee deliberations. Another venue for public comments is the use of the internet. A topically focused and structured comments web page could be an added additional to the current design and would provide an opportunity for public comments to be summarized and presented during Committee deliberations. In practice, the web page would provide a broader opportunity for participation and involvement of citizens, community residents, stakeholders, and others ("the public") in public decision-making.

Staff recommendations: (1) Defer implementation of public comment period until "permanent" structure for COG's climate change initiative is determined. (2) Experiment with web comment option on a few specific topics and determine whether it provides helpful feedback and whether it overwhelms staff capacity to receive, digest, and respond.

5. Add Additional Members to the Climate Change Steering Committee

The issue of climate change affects a wide range of disciplines including environment, transportation, land use, building construction and operation, health and public safety. While the Committee's existing composition covers local government membership, it does not include business people or academicians, or members of various stakeholder organizations concerned with climate change and related issues. Additional members to represent these interests could be added to the committee.

Staff recommendation: Use the guest-speaker and work session options to engage experts and stakeholders. Consider broad stakeholder membership in future committee structure recommendation.