Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BEEAC)

Draft Webinar Meeting Summary: November 20, 2025

BEEAC Local and State Government Members in Attendance:

- Mati Bazurto, City of Bowie, MD (Co-Vice Chair)
- Valerie Amor, City of Alexandria (Co-Vice Chair)
- Allison Homer, Fairfax County
- Andrea
- Amanda Campbell, City of Rockville
- Andrea Lizarzaburu, City of Takoma Park
- Dan Lee, WMATA
- Dory Estrada, City of Takoma Park
- Emily Curley, Montgomery County
- Emma West, WMATA
- Hokuma Karimova, City of Gaithersburg
- Jenny Willoughby, City of Frederick
- Jeremy Good, Montgomery County
- Lili Pita, Fairfax County
- Matt Meyers, Fairfax County
- Maya Dhavale, Fairfax County
- Michelle Smyk, Prince William County
- Rama Mitry, Fairfax County
- Rhina Lara, Arlington County
- Rich Dooley, Arlington County
- Shawn O'Neill, Fairfax Water
- Yi Sun, Prince William County

Additional Attendees:

- Cassandra Lovejoy, NEADA
- Denise Surber, VA Department of Social Services
- Elizabeth Rhyne, Dominion Energy
- Kathie Hoekstra, Alexandria Environmental Policy Committee Member
- Lezael Rorie, SMECO
- Lisa Messina FaJohn, Dominion Energy
- Nicole Fernandes, PEPCO
- Susan Gerson, Loudoun County Public Schools
- Todd Olinsky-Paul, CESA
- William Whitfield, DOEE

COG Staff:

- Alissa Boggs, COG DEP
- Leah Boggs, COG DEP
- Heidi Bonnaffon, COG DEP
- Hilary Chapman, COG Housing
- Robert Christopher, COG DEP
- Maia Davis, COG DEP
- Jeff King, COG DEP
- Caroline Sherman, COG DEP

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mati Bazurto, Director of Business Operations, City of Bowie and BEEAC Co-Vice Chair

Co-Vice Chair Mati Bazurto called the meeting to order, and introductions were given.

2. APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 MEETING SUMMARY

Mati Bazurto, BEEAC Co-Vice Chair

The September 18, 2025, BEEAC meeting summary was approved.

3. JURISDICTION UPDATES AND ROUNDTABLE PEER EXCHANGE

BEEAC Committee Members

Local members provided brief updates on new efficient buildings, green building policy, electric vehicle programs, and other efforts. Addressing the following framing questions: What energy/fuel assistance or relief programs does your local government offer residents that are independent of state LIHEAP assistance? And What steps has your local government taken towards exploring or implementing battery energy storage systems (e.g. planning or pilot programs)?

Summary of Responses:

Arlington County, VA

- No separate local fuel-assistance program; staff primarily help residents connect to state and utility programs (e.g., Dominion).
- E-bike voucher program is fully subscribed, with over 100 e-bikes purchased and all vouchers expected to be used by early 2026.
- A green building incentive policy is scheduled for County Board consideration in December.
- County is developing an energy assurance plan and exploring resilience hubs that would incorporate battery storage at community facilities.

Fairfax County, VA

- Offers cooling assistance, fuel assistance, and crisis assistance; however, funding is currently paused. A new “AC Rescue” program was mentioned.
- Zoning staff are researching best practices to support a zoning ordinance amendment related to battery energy storage systems.

WMATA (Regional – DC/MD/VA)

- Implemented a battery energy storage pilot on the Virginia side of the rail system (near West Falls Church).
- The system captures and reuses regenerative braking energy from trains and was supported in part by federal transit funding; findings were compiled in a formal report.

City of Takoma Park, MD

- No local fuel-assistance program outside of state offerings.
- Not yet ready to deploy battery storage on city buildings; the current focus is on a comprehensive municipal energy audit next year to establish a solid baseline before moving ahead with storage projects.

City of Bowie, MD

- Local fuel-assistance funding is nearly exhausted and remaining resources are being used quickly, including for federal workers.
- Following energy audits at two city buildings under building performance standards, the city is in discussions with the utility about battery backup systems (particularly at City Hall), contingent on ongoing regulatory proceedings.

City of Rockville, MD

- Residents primarily rely on state programs, supplemented by local emergency assistance funds that can help with rent and electricity bills, especially for affected federal employees and contractors.
- Maryland offers no-cost energy efficiency services for income-qualified residents.
- Rockville's updated building code now requires homes and new commercial buildings to be "energy-storage-ready," with reserved space in panels and physical layouts that allow batteries to be added later.

Montgomery County, MD

- The county's Health and Human Services department administers an office that complements state energy assistance and helps residents access available programs.
- Through a low- and moderate-income pilot focused on electrification, free weatherization, and resilience, the county has funded a small number of residential battery systems for households that depend on medically critical equipment and need reliable backup power.

District of Columbia

- DC's utility affordability representative began describing local relief and affordability programs but deferred the detailed overview to the next agenda item, which focused specifically on state and local energy assistance.

4. STATUS OF STATE ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Cassandra Lovejoy – Director of Policy and Managing Director, National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA)
William Whitfield – Associate Director, Utility Affordability Division, DC Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE)
Denise Surber – Energy Assistance Program Manager, Virginia Department of Social Services
Elizabeth Rhyne – Energy Assistance, Dominion Energy Virginia / Dominion Energy North Carolina
Nichole Fernandes – Director, Corporate Community Impact, Pepco Holdings

A panel of local government and utility representatives discussed the state of energy assistance programs during a time when energy prices are rising and federal funding shortages are impacting community focused programs.

National LIHEAP Context (NEADA)

- HHS is expected to release roughly $3.6–3.7 billion in LIHEAP funds for FY 2026.
- Funding is delayed this year due to the federal shutdown and staffing cuts, so many states have been taking applications but holding benefits.
- Even with "level" funding, higher energy prices mean LIHEAP dollars don't go as far, and many eligible households will remain under-served.
- LIHEAP is still primarily a bill-payment program, with a smaller portion used for weatherization in some states.

District of Columbia (DOEE – Utility Affordability)

- DC combines LIHEAP with a Utility Discount Program, offering tiered discounts on electric, gas, and water bills, plus additional targeted relief programs.
- At the time of the meeting, DC had not yet received the new LIHEAP allocation; applications were being processed but benefits could not be issued.
- To stretch dollars, DC has reduced benefit levels (including crisis benefits) and still expects funds to be depleted before the end of the year.
- There is no dedicated local backstop for LIHEAP; staff rely on close coordination with utilities and referrals to utility and charitable assistance funds.

Virginia (Department of Social Services – Energy Assistance Program)

- Virginia's LIHEAP-funded program has four main components:
    - Fuel assistance (roughly half of annual spending, covering a wide range of heating costs).
    - Crisis assistance (deposits, emergency repairs/replacements, urgent bills).
    - Cooling assistance (equipment and summer electric-bill support, with per-household benefits reduced this year to stay on budget).
    - Weatherization, administered by the housing agency with a LIHEAP set-aside.
- The program relies entirely on federal LIHEAP dollars, with no dedicated state appropriation in statute.
- As with DC, Virginia has been managing applications while waiting for federal allocations to be finalized.
- The state is discussing the need for contingency strategies to reduce vulnerability to federal delays.
- Virginia also operates a Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP) with major electric utilities to cap bills as a share of income and manage arrears.

Utility Perspectives and Tools

Dominion Energy

- Runs EnergyShare, a crisis-based assistance program that:
    - Is not strictly income-qualified.
    - Can support multiple heating fuels.
    - Includes targeted tracks for veterans and people with disabilities.

- Offers payment arrangements (short- and long-term) and budget billing, supported by an energy assistance team that works directly with local agencies.
- Has disconnection protections, avoiding shutoffs before holidays, on Fridays, or during extreme weather, and a serious medical policy for customers using life-support equipment.
- For PIPP customers, only the past-due PIPP amount (not the full historical arrears) is required to avoid disconnection.

Pepco Holdings

- Layers LIHEAP with state programs such as arrearage management, universal service programs, and seasonal shutoff protections.
- Provides flexible payment options: extended due dates, 12-month payment plans for past-due balances, and budget billing.
- Uses digital tools for hourly-usage tracking, projected bills, high-usage alerts, and an "assistance finder" that screens customers for multiple benefit programs (including housing assistance).
- Maintains a community engagement team active in DC, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County to provide in-person assistance.

SMECO (Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative)

- Offers the "Members Helping Members" fund, allowing co-op members to donate toward neighbors' electric bills via a community action agency.
- Uses budget billing, flexible arrangements, and special accommodations (for example, during federal shutdowns) to help members avoid shutoffs and manage sudden financial hardship.

The discussion emphasized that while LIHEAP funding is finally being released, it is not keeping pace with rising energy costs, so demand for assistance remains high and many eligible households will still face gaps. Jurisdictions such as DC and Virginia are heavily reliant on federal dollars, with limited or no dedicated state and local backstops, which makes their programs particularly vulnerable to federal delays and year-to-year uncertainty. In this context, utilities are playing an increasingly central role in the safety net by offering layered assistance strategies that combine crisis funds, arrearage management and forgiveness programs, flexible payment plans, usage analytics and alerts, and proactive outreach to help customers stay connected and manage their energy burden.

5. BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

Todd Olinsky-Paul, Senior Project Director, Clean Energy States Alliance

Todd Olinsky-Paul, Senior Project Director with the Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA), who also works closely with Clean Energy Group. He introduced both organizations as nonprofits that partner with state energy offices and regulators, especially on energy storage policy and program design. He highlighted their work on the Energy Storage Technology Advancement Partnership (STAP) with Sandia National Labs and DOE, which supports states in developing large-scale storage demonstration projects and provides reports, webinars, and other technical resources.

Todd framed battery energy storage as a multi-use tool whose real-world impact depends entirely on how programs and markets are designed. He described a "toolbox" of state policy options—ranging from studies and pilots to market-building strategies like procurement mandates or targets, customer incentives (rebates, tax credits, storage adders), low-cost financing, and regulatory reforms. A central theme was that program design should start from clearly defined policy goals. For example, if the goal is greenhouse gas reduction, incentives should favor storage that charges from clean generation and discharges when fossil plants are on the margin; if the goal is building electrification or resilience, storage should be paired with solar, heat pumps, or critical facilities in ways that directly support those outcomes.

He then focused on state energy storage procurement mandates, targets, and goals, noting that about a dozen states have some form of storage procurement policy, with more on the way. He distinguished between a mandate (binding, with consequences if not met), a target (a defined but non-binding goal with some accountability), and a goal (aspirational, with little or no enforcement). He emphasized that how these are structured matters as much as the headline number.

Todd outlined several best practices for designing storage mandates and targets:

- Include carve-outs or bonus incentives for priority technologies, such as long-duration or non-lithium storage, because the market will otherwise default to four-hour lithium-ion systems.
- Create carve-outs for priority applications that match state goals—such as peaker plant replacement, peak demand reduction, transmission and distribution deferral, resilience, or emissions reduction.
- Support a mix of ownership models (utility-owned, customer-owned, and third-party/merchant) across a variety of grid locations (transmission, distribution, and behind-the-meter), so storage can serve both system needs and community needs.
- Build in equity provisions, such as explicit equity budgets or criteria, and enable models like distributed storage and virtual power plants, where utilities can aggregate behind-the-meter batteries and dispatch them as a grid resource.

As a concrete example, he highlighted California's approach. California was the first state to adopt an energy storage procurement mandate and has already exceeded its original targets, in part because requirements are broken down by utility and grid location (transmission, distribution, and customer-side). He also described how California's Self-Generation Incentive Program (SGIP) evolved: it began as a broad clean-energy incentive, then became heavily focused on solar, and more recently has been reoriented toward storage with an explicit emissions focus. Early on, simple upfront rebates didn't reliably cut greenhouse gases, so the program shifted to a structure where part of the incentive is paid upfront and part is performance-based, rewarding customers for charging when emissions are low and discharging when emissions are high. The program includes equity and resilience carve-outs, such as dedicated budgets for low-income customers and communities facing frequent outages, and has supported tens of thousands of storage installations totaling well over a gigawatt-hour of capacity.

Todd closed by stressing that effective storage policy is about alignment and intentional design: states and regions need to be explicit about what they want storage to do—decarbonize the grid, improve resilience, advance equity, reduce system costs—and then tailor incentives, ownership structures, and siting rules to those priorities. He noted that CESA and Clean Energy Group make

their storage publications and webinars freely available and encouraged jurisdictions to reach out for follow-up technical assistance.

6. ANNOUNCEMENTS, 2026 MEETING SCHEDULE AND ADJOURNMENT

Valerie Amor, Energy Manager, City of Alexandria and BEEAC Co-Vice Chair
COG Staff

In the final agenda item, Leah Boggs provided an update on the Environmental Justice Toolkit refresh. She noted that a draft is going through a first-level review now; it will then be circulated to CEEPC, BEEAC, and community-based organizations for further comment, with a final toolkit expected by the end of January.

Lastly, the upcoming 2026 BEEAC meeting schedule was confirmed. The meeting was then formally adjourned.

All meeting materials including speaker presentations and video recording can be found on the MWCOG website by clicking the link below –
https://www.mwcog.org/events/2025/11/20/built-environment-and-energy-advisory-committee/