

“Federation Corner” column
The Montgomery Sentinel, 17 December 2015

Climate change and the county

By Danila Sheveiko

With climate justice activists dubbing the Paris deal an “[Epic fail on a planetary scale](#),” local efforts to address climate change can fail in some of the most progressive jurisdictions like Montgomery County, MD – Washington DC’s affluent neighbor with a budget in the billions.

Official reports indicate Montgomery County’s energy consumption has increased despite a decade-old mandate to decrease emissions of greenhouse gases. Although [the mandate was legislatively watered down](#) in 2014 to remove the sense of urgency, an appendix to the Department of Environmental Protection Sustainability Report released earlier this year [acknowledges the hard truth](#): “the County is not on track to meet the goals” established in the Climate Protection Plan:

“...reduce County wide greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below the amount... in the base year [FY05]... including a plan to stop increasing County wide emissions by 2010 and achieve a 10 percent reduction every 5 years through 2050.”

An average annual percentage increase in total energy use of 0.51 percent documented by DEP Sustainability Report may seem acceptable, but this statistic hides an alarming reality that any persistent annual increase – no matter how small – stands in stark contrast to the 10 percent GHG emissions reduction goal we should have already reached by 2015 and the 20 percent reduction target looming by 2020. With climate change widely acknowledged as a national security and existential threat by everyone from Sierra Club to the [Central Intelligence Agency](#), the question of just how exactly one of the wealthiest and supposedly progressive counties in the United States can fail so miserably demands an answer. To make the long sad story short, the usual scapegoat is not available in a jurisdiction with a million people and [zero Republicans elected to political office](#), exposing a regional culture where most environmental groups are unwilling to confront Democratic officeholders, where the Maryland Department of Environment [annual hero award is sponsored by the state’s fracking lobby](#) Maryland Petroleum Council, and where a mere mention of these unpleasant realities can get one banned from polite society. Following decades of inaction and empty rhetoric, [the planet’s sixth mass extinction of Life is well under way](#) and latest climate data shows [it may be too late to prevent catastrophic sea level rise](#) and collapse of civilization – consequences that are hard to fully grasp for even the most seasoned minds. Humanity’s brief triumphant rise led to a final test – evolve or die.

If humans are to pass the test, [the deal reached between corporations and states](#) globally in Paris will have to be exceeded around the planet by people locally. In Montgomery County, [building energy use account for two thirds of documented GHG emissions](#) and so far efforts to address the largest local contributor to the global problem have failed the test of time. The County Council authored a very modest [Green Buildings Law](#) in 2006. In 2011 Maryland allowed jurisdictions to adopt the 2012 International Green Construction Code and Montgomery began to consider adoption. Four years of bureaucratic wrangling later, on Dec. 1st, 2015 the Department of Permitting Services [published](#) draft 2012 IgCC [Executive Regulation 21-15](#) that eviscerates the Code’s baseline of minimum sustainability requirements and [ignores words of caution](#) from DEP and [pleas from activists](#) alike:

Montgomery's Green Construction Woes

Environmental benefits from proposed sustainable building code uncertain.

<http://wearemoco.org/montgomerys-green-construction-woes-environmental-benefits-from-proposed-sustainable-building-code-uncertain/>

DPS is questioning studies on benefits of green construction and refusing to budge despite admitting the reality on camera earlier this year (video [here](#)):

“First of all, probably the most important point, is that over time these costs are recovered and I want to stress that – whether you are doing a large building or a small building – over time the energy costs will be covered which is good for the long-term owner. It may not be as good for the person who is getting... whose business model is that they build, and then they flip it and get out.”

The time for climate action is now or never – we can't afford the flip-it-and-get-out crowd to keep running the show. Those who want to leave this planet to their children and grandchildren for the long term can prevent another climate fail in Montgomery County during [just one single opportunity](#) to speak their piece at a daytime public hearing DPS is holding for ER 21-15 on Thursday, Dec. 17th, 1:30pm in the Department of Economic Development Conference Room – Suite 800, 111 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD. To testify at the public hearing contact Steve Thomas, Department of Permitting Services, Building Construction, at (240) 777-6216.