

Item 8 - Correspondence

From: [Denisse Guitarra](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#); [Afzal, Khalid](#); [Findley, Steve](#)
Cc: [Anne Cottingham](#); piaolster@gmail.com; [Eliza Cava](#)
Subject: Re: Nature Forward - Item #8 - Climate Assessment tools for master plans and ZTAs per Bill 3-22
Date: Tuesday, December 6, 2022 1:10:31 PM
Attachments: [image006.png](#)
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[UPDATED -Nature Forward - Item 8 - Climate Assessment.pdf](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Dear Montgomery Planning Board,

We have found a bullet point that needed to be corrected. Please take the attached copy as the final copy of my testimony. Apologies for the inconvenience.

Thank you,
Denisse

Denisse Guitarra

Maryland Conservation Advocate
She/Elia
(240) 630 - 4703

Nature Forward | 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, MD 20815 | natureforward.org



nature forward
Connecting people and nature in the Capital Region

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Audubon Naturalist Society,
Est. 1897

For the 4th consecutive year, ANS has earned a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, which indicates that we are accountable, transparent, and adhere to financial best practices.



From: Denisse Guitarra <denisse.guitarra@natureforward.org>

Date: Tuesday, December 6, 2022 at 9:20 AM

To: mcp-chair@mncppc-mc.org <mcp-chair@mncppc-mc.org>, Afzal, Khalid <khalid.afzal@montgomeryplanning.org>, Findley, Steve <steve.findley@montgomeryplanning.org>

Cc: Anne Cottingham <cottpaw@gmail.com>, piailster@gmail.com <piailster@gmail.com>, Eliza Cava <Eliza.Cava@natureforward.org>

Subject: Nature Forward - Item #8 - Climate Assessment tools for master plans and ZTAs per Bill 3-22

Dear Montgomery Planning Board,

Please find attached in this email Nature Forward's written testimony on Item #8 - Climate Assessment tools for master plans and ZTAs per Bill 3-22 ahead of this Thursday's Planning Board meeting. Should you have any questions of our testimony, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Denisse Guitarra

Denisse Guitarra

Maryland Conservation Advocate
She/Elle
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December 6th 2022,

**Written comments for 12/8/22 Planning Board hearing on - Item 8-
Climate Assessment¹ tools for master plans and ZTAs per Bill 3-22^[1]**

Submitted by:

Denisse Guitarra, Maryland Conservation Advocate, Nature Forward

Anne Cottingham, Conservation Volunteer, Nature Forward

Dear Montgomery County Planning Board,

For 125 years, Nature Forward (formerly Audubon Naturalist Society) has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. Our priorities include fighting the climate crisis, protecting biodiversity & habitats, increasing human health & access to nature, and promoting sustainable land use. By enacting Bill 3-22 to require the preparation of climate assessments for master plans and zoning text amendments (ZTAs), the Council has facilitated more informed decision-making on climate impacts. We commend this proactive Council action. We thank the Planning Board for the opportunity to provide testimony on Item #8 at the December 8th Planning Board Meeting on Climate Assessment tools for master plans and ZTAs per Bill 3-22. We provide the following comments as part of our testimony.

We support the following:

- The bold approach taken by the Planning Staff to tackle climate change by performing climate assessments on future ZTAs and Master Plans before the County Council. This proactive approach will highlight Montgomery County as one of the first and still few counties in the US to lead this effort.

¹ Item 8 - Climate Assessment tools for master plans and ZTAs per Bill 3-22. Available at: <https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/agenda-item/december-08-2022/>



- The Planning Staff's recommended approval of the ICF's proposed template for conducting climate assessments for master plans and ZTAs.²
- The inclusion of the transportation, building emissions, energy emissions, and land cover & management sectors as part of the GHG checklist and review of the County's Climate Action Plan (CAP) priorities.
- The commitment to work on a full GHG emission and sequestration report on Master Plans vs ZTAs, given they have a longer review period of approximately 18 months.
- The connection to the Climate Action Plan (CAP) by including a review of the CAP's recommended actions in the ZTA and Master Plan's climate assessments process.
- In the "community resilience and adaptive capacity" checklist we support the addition of the core components of vulnerability, exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to enhance the overall climate assessment review for ZTAs and Master Plans.

We recommend updating the following:

- **Some ZTAs will need a more comprehensive GHG accounting than the report recommends.** The final ICF report as written states that climate assessments for ZTAs need not include an extensive GHG emissions report like that required for the Master Plans. Instead, GHG emissions and sequestration estimates for ZTAs will be more qualitative and be conducted in a three-step approach which will be 1) complete GHG and sequestration checklist; 2) Determine relationship to County climate priorities; and 3) Prepare assessment narrative. Currently only Master Plans have a four-step approach of GHG assessment which include 1) conduct data availability assessment; 2) Conduct qualitative GHG assessment; 3) Quantify GHG emissions and sequestration; 4) Prepare the narrative assessment.

While we appreciate that many ZTAs are relatively simple and unlikely to have significant impact on GHG emissions, others are the opposite. For example, a climate assessment for pending ZTA 20-07 (which would allow more duplexes, townhouses, and apartments in R-60 zones within 1 mile of Metrorail transit stations) could benefit from a more extensive GHG emission study showing how carbon would be released in the form of trees cut down by densifying around transit corridors, vs the carbon saved by transit-oriented development.³

² Final Report Climate Assessment Recommendations for Master Plans and Zoning Text Amendments in Montgomery County. ICF. 2022. Available at: https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Attachment-A-ICF-Climate-Assessments-Recommendations_12-2-22-Final.pdf

³ Bill 52-22 and ZTA 20-07. Landlord-Tenant Relations - Protection Against Rent Gouging Near Transit Available at: <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/BillDetailsPage?RecordId=2690&fullTextSearch=zta%20AND%2020-07>



We recommend that some particularly impactful ZTAs (such as 20-07) also receive the same 4-step climate assessment review process as is proposed to be done for Master Plans. The workflow for deciding on the assessment process (3-step or 4-step) for a ZTA should begin with a decisional step that includes a qualitative analysis of whether significant GHG emissions are likely from any given ZTA, and then proceed to either the 3-step or 4-step process. An analogue to this decisional process is the “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI) document that allows a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) assessment to proceed to the less-involved Environmental Assessment versus the more-involved Environmental Impact Statement.

- **Data Updates:** Continue to use the best available data to create the most up to date and accurate climate reports and review the process of creating these reports on a repeating cycle. For example, for forest loss we recommend using the recently published Maryland Forest Technical Study by the Harry Hughes Center data and report.⁴

On behalf of Nature Forward and our 28,000 members and supporters, we recommend that the Planning Board incorporate our comments and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra

MD Conservation Advocate

Nature Forward

(Formerly Audubon Naturalist Society)

⁴ Maryland Forest Technical Study. 2022. The Harry Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology. Available at: <https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/mdforeststudy2022>

From: karen.metchis
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Cc: [Afzal, Khalid](#); [Stern, Tanya](#); [Karl Held](#)
Subject: Testimony for Dec. 8 agenda item #8 on climate assessment
Date: Tuesday, December 6, 2022 10:19:12 AM
Attachments: [CAP Coalition Testimony-final-12082022.pdf](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Attached please find my testimony representing the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan Coalition (CAP Coalition), which I would like to present orally, in person. (I note that this item was not in the options to sign up online)

Karen Metchis
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Bethesda, MD 20814
(301) 351-3172
karen.metchis@gmail.com
Speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan Coalition (CAP Coalition)

Karen Metchis
karen.metchis@gmail.com

Testimony: Climate Assessment tools for master plans and ZTAs per Bill 3-22

December 8, 2022

Karen Metchis, on behalf of the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan Coalition

My name is Karen Metchis, and I am speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan Coalition (or CAP Coalition for short). We support adoption of this template, noting that we are all on a learning curve and that after using the template for a while we will gain a better sense of how to improve it.

The CAP Coalition is a coalition of more than 15 grass-roots community organizations and many individuals. In 2017 we successfully advocated that the county adopt the Climate Emergency Declaration in which the County committed to reducing Greenhouse Gasses by 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035. Since then, we have worked with the County Executive, the County Council, and County staff to adopt legislative measures as well as executive branch programs to work towards these goals. Our goal is to ensure robust and equitable implementation of the Climate Action Plan consistent with emergency action.

The CAP Coalition was fundamentally involved in developing and passing the Climate Assessment legislation which requires the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) to conduct a climate change assessment of all legislative bills; and requires the Planning Department to conduct a climate assessment of all master plans, master plan amendments, and zoning text amendments.

The assessments are to evaluate the quantitative or qualitative effects of actions on greenhouse gas emissions, sequestration, and carbon drawdown; as well as quantitative or qualitative implications for community resilience and adaptive capacity. Further, each climate assessment must identify amendments or other recommendations that would reduce or eliminate negative effects of the proposed actions or plans.

The bill further requires OLO and Planning to work with stakeholders to develop a template for how to conduct these assessments, methods which **must** be reviewed and updated at least every two years to ensure effectiveness.

Over the past few months, we have appreciated working with the Planning staff and truly appreciate the financial and staff resources that the Planning Board dedicated to developing the template. We extend not just our appreciation, but also our kudos for the work they have done.

Needless to say, this has been a learning process for all of us. As far as we know, Montgomery County is the first in the nation to require such comprehensive evaluations of legislation, master plans, and ZTAs and we are aware that other counties are watching with interest how we do this.

Over the course of three consultation sessions, we have submitted several recommendations - many of which were incorporated. However, the review process was very fast paced with short turnaround times, so we want to add some additional recommendations today based on the final report which we received just last Friday. After having more time to digest it, we reserve the right to make additional suggestions in the coming weeks and months as this template is tested.

Our comments and reflections focus in four aspects:

1. The planning process and ongoing public engagement
2. The Quant Tool for evaluating GHGs, especially with regards to data
3. The Qualitative Assessment for ZTAs and non-quantifiable GHGs in master plans
4. The Resilience and Adaptive Capacity chapter

1. The planning process and ongoing public engagement

We enthusiastically applaud the shift to conducting the Climate Assessment for MPs/ZTAs during the initial phases and throughout the planning process, rather than after the fact as is currently done. We hold the expectation that all master plans and ZTAs from now on should embody the goals to intentionally reduce GHG emissions, advance carbon drawdown, and build resilience.

We recommend that the Planning Staff be provided with sufficient resources needed to ensure development of the QUANT tool, the data inputs, and a public facing dashboard, and to be able to conduct effective assessments over time.

We request that stakeholders, including the CAP Coalition, be allowed to further comment on the results of the pilot testing of the template for both the MP and ZTA methods, and ongoing as the template and data are reviewed in the coming months and years.

2. The Quant Tool for evaluating GHGs, especially with regards to data

When the QUANT tool and dashboard are developed by Planning staff and their contractor, the CAP Coalition requests an opportunity for review.

As Planning Department staff become more skilled with the use of the QUANT tool for master plans, we request that Planning reconsider the decision to only conduct qualitative assessments of ZTAs. Despite the 3-week turnaround, with the use of the QUANT tool it may be possible to quantify some outcomes. We note that OLO – also under a 3-week turnaround period - will be attempting to quantify effects of legislation on GHG emissions.

We recommend that nature-based solutions, in fact, be included in the QUANT tool.

Importantly, the CAP Coalition urges the Planning Department to mount a systematic focus on improving the availability and quality of climate change related data for the County to ensure optimal outcomes. Planning staff have done a good job identifying appropriate recent data sources for this proposal, but the shortcomings of current County-specific data and lack of frequent updates could lead to inaccurate conclusions without improved data collection and data quality on both emissions and sequestration. The fact that sequestration effects are "not assessed" in Table 2 of the Final Report illustrates this point. It would be appropriate for the Planning Department to lead the County government on developing a more robust climate change-related data system for the County.

3. The Qualitative Assessment for ZTAs and non-quantifiable GHGs for master plans

We observed that the revised Steps 2 and 3 method (Pages 16-17) for both ZTAs and MP qualitative assessment has changed since we last saw an earlier draft version of the Consultant’s report. In general, the revised method is an improvement, although we have the following recommendations:

- The consultant’s Final Report, Table 2, provides a qualitative GHG reduction score for each activity based on the *2021 County Climate Action Plan* (Page 16). The table lists all the sequestration topics as ‘not assessed’. In this case, we ask that Planning ascribe CAP Actions S-1, S-2, and S-3 (forests, trees, and meadows & wetlands respectively) as “medium reduction impact” on GHGs emissions, given their essential role. CAP Actions S-4, S-5, and S-6 (agriculture, soils, and carbon management) should be noted as areas for future tool development, or included in the ‘other nature based solution’ category and given at least a “low reduction impact” designation (despite the fact that they are actually important carbon sinks).
- In preparing a qualitative assessment narrative for a ZTA or MP, no explanation is provided in the Consultant’s final report on how the results of the narrative climate assessment will be developed. Merely saying that “Montgomery Planning should create a narrative for the climate assessment that summarizes the information developed through the steps above” does not provide a description of the actual approach for developing the summary results. Without more details, we have very little information on the methodology to be used for the qualitative assessment. We recommend that the Planning Department provide further details on the qualitative assessment narrative approach so the public will better understand and have confidence in the basis for each narrative.
- In addition, we note that Planning has incorporated the notion of co-benefits and trade-offs where there are both pluses and minuses to an aspect of MPs and ZTAs. As we gain more experience in using the template, we would like to revisit how these situations are evaluated and discussed in the narrative.

4. The Resilience and Adaptive Capacity chapter

One area that needs clarification that is most relevant to the resilience chapter is what goes into the existing conditions analysis, and how it factors into master plans and ZTAs especially in areas undergoing redevelopment. For example, resilience will be affected in areas with aging stormwater infrastructure in light of both increasing impervious area and increasingly intensive precipitation. The existing conditions analysis merits more discussion.

Conclusion

We very much look forward to the implementation of these climate assessments, and the CAP Coalition stands ready to help. It’s a heavy lift, but if done well, we have the potential to make historic adjustments in how our community functions – if done well, we can stem our emissions of GHGs that are catastrophically set to change our climate, and if done well, we can hope to prepare our community for the certain effects that will inevitably cause harm and inflict economic and public health costs. It is incumbent on all of us to do our part and even make sacrifices for the sake of the future. And you, the Planning Board, are in an essential role. The burden is on your shoulders to make a true difference and to

help Montgomery County be a national leader in the fight against climate change. Please, adopt this report and provide the needed resources to your staff to do the best job possible.

Thank you.