

Draft motion for Sustainability Commission – Recommendation to BOCS to Consider Energy and Sustainability Impact Assessments to Support Major Decisions

While awaiting the development of the Community Energy and Sustainability Master Plan (CESMP), it is the recommendation of the Sustainability Commission that the Board of County Supervisors immediately adopt a practice of assessing the energy and sustainability impacts of each new “major” land use, housing, and infrastructure (water, transportation, energy) decision. Energy and sustainability impact assessments (ESIAs) should include succinctly quantifying, to the extent practical, for the proposed action and alternatives under consideration (including a no-action alternative where the project is not conducted):

- greenhouse gas emissions
- energy (renewable and non-renewable) use
- resilience to climate impacts
- impacts on water resources (quality and quantity)
- vehicle miles traveled (for transportation projects).

Background:

PWC endorsed MWCOG’s regional climate mitigation and resiliency goals in November 2020 ([MOTION: \(pwcgov.org\)](https://www.pwcgov.org)), including these goals:

- 50% greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions below baseline 2005 levels by 2030
- 100% of PWC’s electricity to be from renewable sources by 2035
- Prince William County Government operations to achieve 100% renewable electricity by 2030
- Prince William County Government to be 100% carbon neutral by 2050.

MWCOG developed a GHG inventory for PWC, covering a base year of 2005, plus 2012, 2015, and 2018 (the most recent year available). The results indicate that PWC’s emissions increased 19% between 2005 to 2018. **To hit PWC’s 50% GHG reduction goal, we will need to reduce emissions by 58% compared to 2018 levels**, and current levels are probably higher than 2018 levels, requiring even greater proportional cuts.

Although a comparable inventory of energy use and climate resilience actions doesn’t yet exist for PWC, we anticipate that it will take aggressive actions to attain the renewable energy and resilience goals as well. Though the climate mitigation and resilience resolution does not explicitly address vehicle miles traveled, the transportation sector is the biggest source of GHGs in Prince William County, so VMTs are a key indicator of emissions from this sector. Similarly, water resources will be a key climate impact area, and the focus of resilience efforts, so understanding the effects on water resources will be equally vital to attaining the climate resilience goals.

The Sustainability Commission does not anticipate being able to review a draft CESMP (which will be prepared by a contractor with oversight from County staff) until 2023, and our recommendations to the BOCS will be developed shortly after that. Meanwhile, the BOCS will be making decisions on many land use, housing, and infrastructure (water, transportation, energy) issues that could significantly affect GHG emissions, energy use, and climate resilience. Many of the policies required to attain the goals of the climate mitigation and resilience resolution are likely to take years to take effect.

In short, we find ourselves in a deep hole, and the current business-as-usual approach is only going to dig the hole deeper. We need to change business as usual so that the BOCS can consider information

from Energy and Sustainability Impact Assessments (ESIAs) to immediately make more informed decisions on major projects. The board could adopt a definition of “major” projects to include, for example, any project involving more than \$10 million in public funds or more than 100 acres.

Implementation will be at the discretion of the BOCS; they could, for example, direct the Energy/Environment Sustainability Officer to have the responsibility for preparing ESIs, with resources to be drawn from the newly appropriated sustainability line item in the FY22/23 budget.

We anticipate that even after preparation of the CESMP, this practice should be continued, but it is essential that it be initiated in the interim before the CESMP is completed.