

Nation-leading climate legislation: The Climate Commitment Act, B24-0267

On July 12th, the DC Council unanimously passed the Climate Commitment Act, possibly the most important climate legislation for the District in several years.

Mayor Muriel Bowser committed the District in December 2017 to becoming carbon neutral by 2050, and several subsequent Department of Energy and Environment plans have discussed pathways to that goal. However, the commitment has never had the force of law, nor is it self-implementing. Any pathway to weaning DC homes and buildings off greenhouse gas-producing methane gas, and vehicles off gasoline and diesel, will involve real costs and be politically challenging. Having the greenhouse gas reduction requirements in law is critical.

Moreover, the Climate Commitment Act moves up the timetable for achieving carbon neutrality from 2050 to 2045 accelerates the implementation schedule, and specifically requires that the District stop buying fossil fuel-based appliances and cars for its own operations. The new deadlines are consonant with continually emerging information about the scale of the climate crisis, as well as recent legislation passed in Maryland.

These are the key provisions of the Climate Commitment Act:

- “The District of Columbia shall reduce emissions of greenhouse gases as measured in the greenhouse gas inventory produced by the District Department of Energy and Environment:
 - Not less than 45% below 2006 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2025;
 - Not less than 60% below 2006 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2030;
 - Not less than 70% below 2006 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2035;
 - Not less than 85% below 2006 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2040; and
 - To a level consistent with carbon neutrality by 2045, and in each year thereafter.

- The District shall reduce emissions attributable to District government operations, including emissions related to dispositions of government property, to a level consistent with carbon neutrality by 2040. In working to achieve these reductions, the District shall prioritize actions that result in additional renewable energy generation.
- To achieve the reductions required by paragraph (1) of this subsection, the Mayor shall establish a task force of relevant District agencies to prepare an action plan for carbon neutrality for District government operations by 2040, including the estimated funding and timeline for each action identified.
- Beginning January 1, 2025, the District shall not install, in District-owned buildings, space- or water-heating appliances that rely on the combustion of natural gas, oil, or other fossil fuels at the site of the appliance, except in cases where compliance would be technically infeasible.
- Beginning January 1, 2026, the District shall purchase or lease only zero-emissions vehicles, except in cases where there is no such vehicle readily available on the market.
- In working to achieve the emissions reductions required by...this section, the District shall seek to advance racial equity, redress past environmental and public health inequities, and use measures that have the least harmful effect on local ecosystems.”

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