

Building A Better Maryland

Healthy, Efficient, & Affordable



Summary of the Better Buildings Act of 2024

The Better Buildings Act has been crossfiled by Senator Benjamin Brooks and others in the Senate (SB1023) and Delegate Adrian Bofo and others in the House (HB1279.) It would make future buildings in the state of Maryland healthier, cheaper to live and work in, and better for both the climate and local air pollution. So far, 32 national, state, and local environmental groups have endorsed the bill. It makes perfect sense that Maryland should take this action to stop more climate pollution which we try to reduce the amount that we already emit. It makes perfect sense to build smart from the start.

After a section of definitions, the Better Buildings Act has two substantive divisions: a section requiring electrification, EV-readiness, and solar readiness; and a section requiring substantial energy conservation in new buildings over 25,000 square feet, towards the goal of only renewable energy use.

Section A of the bill contains the definitions of “EV-capable space”, “EV-ready space,” “Electric vehicle supply equipment,” “Electric-ready,” “Significant improvement,” “Site Energy Use Intensity,” and “Solar Ready.”

Section B requires the Department of Labor’s Building Codes Administration to modify the Maryland Building Performance Standards to require, as of October 1, 2026, that:

- All new buildings meet their water and space heating demands without the use of fossil fuels,
- Waivers can be granted by jurisdictions for emergency backup systems and buildings and significant improvements specifically designated for occupancy by a commercial food establishment, laboratory, laundromat, hospital, or crematorium, but only for systems and areas that cannot feasibly use non-fossil energy. Financial considerations are explicitly not sufficient for a determination of feasibility.
- Buildings granted waivers must seek to minimize emissions; maximize health, safety, and fire protection; and be built electric-ready.

SMART FROM THE START

- Solar-ready for buildings that are 20 stories or less and have 20,000 square feet or more of continuous roof space. (Waivers could be granted by local jurisdictions for poor sun conditions.)
- EV-capable, EV-ready, or EV charging spaces if parking is provided, depending on the building type.
- Jurisdictions are given explicit permission to be more stringent.

Section C requires the Department of Labor’s Building Codes Administration to modify the Maryland Building Performance Standards to require new buildings over 25,000 square feet to meet, on average across the state, specific “Site Energy Use Intensity (EUI)” targets.

- EUI targets vary depending on whether buildings are subject to the residential or the commercial code, and which of Maryland’s two climate zones they are in.
- Site EUI targets become more stringent in each triennial period October 2026 through September 2029; October 2029 through September 2032; and October 2032 through September 2035.
- The goal is net zero energy balance for building permit applications received on or after October 1, 2035.
- The BCA is required to estimate site energy use intensity according to the methodology used by the US Department of Energy and its contractors (such as the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory) and is encouraged to seek advice from such entities. Calculations must be equal across fuel types.

Much of the bill’s language is similar to text in the 2021 and 2022 Climate Solutions Now Act, where it was dropped in the Senate in favor of a now-complete grid capacity study. It also draws from the proposed 2024 International Energy Conservation Codes.

The net effect of passing the Better Buildings Act would be to reduce carbon pollution emissions both directly (through onsite combustion) and indirectly (through electric generation), improve air quality, and substantially lower utility costs for homeowners, renters, and tenants.

For more information on the Better Buildings Act, contact Doug Siglin of Building a Better Maryland at 202 997 7399 or Doug@BetterMaryland.org.