



**SIERRA
CLUB**

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Spring 2021

Equitable transit moves people, not communities

by Cheri Conca

The growing movement for equitable transit raises awareness of the difficulties and injustices that riders who depend on public transportation face on a daily basis. On February 4, Rosa Parks' birthday, organizations and transit riders around the country celebrated the Fourth Annual Transit Equity Day to share these challenges and explore solutions. With the dawn of a new federal administration plus a heightened focus on transit at the state and regional levels, promising initiatives are being launched to make transit affordable and accessible to everyone. But here's a wrinkle that must not be overlooked: in our quest to expand and improve transit for everyone, we must first make sure not to displace the very people who are most dependent on public transportation.

Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

held an engaging virtual conversation for Transit Equity Day. Transit experts and advocates from around the commonwealth shared unique solutions for ensuring that strong, affordable and accessible transit systems are developed and thrive. You can watch the event at <https://bit.ly/SCVATransitEquityDay>

Here are some highlights from the event:

RVA Rapid Transit in Richmond created a community engagement program to hear what riders want out of bus ridership in order to create a more frequent and far-reaching transit system that will allow people to lead healthier, more productive and more interconnected lives.

Hampton Roads Transit successfully pushed for more state funding to provide better reliability, faster commutes and new con-

nections in the heavily populated region. In 2021, the agency will reduce time between buses on certain routes from 30 minutes to 15 minutes and provide shelters at 600 bus stops.

In Charlottesville, the Community Climate Collaborative tackles transit equity from a unique angle, increasing ridership within the entire regional population to ensure continued state and federal funding of public transportation. A University of Virginia study revealed that riders dependent on bus transit feel a lack of respect. Creating a transit system that serves all socio-economic groups can raise ridership and remove the stigma of bus ridership as well as create community and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector. Joint long-term planning of transportation and affordable

housing is critical to the success of the transit system.

Paradoxically, new public transit projects can actually decrease equity by displacing low-income communities and mom-and-pop shops in favor of higher-priced multifamily housing and upscale retail and restaurants. To truly provide opportunity for everyone, every effort to preserve existing communities must be made and new "affordable" housing around transit stations must actually be affordable. Will the rents after redevelopment be comparable to current rents?

A perfect example is the Embark Richmond Highway project, which envisions an 8-mile stretch of business centers and bus rapid transit stations along Route 1 in Fairfax County. The targeted

See Equitable transit on page 11.

Life at the fenceline of environmental injustices: MVP's proposal to pollute Pittsylvania

by Lynn Godfrey

Poor communities and communities of color disproportionately bear the burden of the environmental impacts of the energy industry's fossil fuel buildout and operations in the United States and worldwide. More than one million African Americans live within 1 mile of existing natural gas facilities, and the numbers are growing. Furthermore, more than one million African Americans live in counties with a risk of cancer from toxins polluting the air from fossil fuel operations that is higher than the EPA's level of concern, according to NAACP and Clean Air Task Force's seminal report, *Fumes at the Fenceline*. Pittsylvania County, Virginia, will be no different.

Mountain Valley Pipeline, LLC is proposing a compressor station in Pittsylvania County, about 2 miles within the town of Chatham, Virginia. The sole purpose of the proposed Lambert



A fenceline community in Houston, Texas (photo courtesy of Bryan Parras).

Compressor Station will be to compress fracked gas in order to transport it to the Southgate spur line of the MVP mainline in North Carolina. It would be less than 1 mile (0.8 mi) from two existing Transco compressor stations.

Ironically, Transco, in a strange turn of events, has filed a lawsuit against the MVP. According to an article in the March 16, 2021 Roanoke Times, the "MVP's proposed location is simply irresponsible," and, it "raises significant

safety concerns for Transco and the general public."

Nestled within a 1-mile radius of these two toxin-producing facilities is the Banister neighborhood, which would bear the greatest burden of the poison these three fracked gas facilities surely would produce. Banister is an old African and Indigenous American community rich in history, where you will find Anderson and Elizabeth Jones, landowners adversely impacted by the MVP who are holding on to a 98-year-old farmland and their heritage.

Anderson is of Indigenous heritage; Elizabeth is African American, proudly claiming her Cameroon, West African lineage. Anderson remembers finding arrowheads and pottery chards as a child when playing on the land and, later as a farmer, working

See Lambert Compressor Station on page 10.

The passing of Charles Price, Virginia Chapter Chair 2007-2011

by Glen Besa and Tyla Matteson

Sierra Club notes with sorrow the passing of Charles Price, who served as chair of the Virginia Chapter from 2007 to 2011.

We thought it best to write this remembrance of Charles Price in the first person as Charles was our friend and a friend to many of you active in the Virginia Chapter of Sierra Club when he was a volunteer leader. He served four years as Chapter chair from 2007 to 2011, and in Richmond, he chaired the Falls of the James Group from 2002 to 2007.

Many of our senior leaders in Virginia trace their involvement to his recruiting prowess. Bob Shippee recalled that Charles convinced him to take on the role of Chapter treasurer over a decade ago, and now Bob is our legislative chair. Ivy Main, our Conservation and Clean Energy chair recalled that “he was the chair when I became involved with the Chapter and was my model for leading with grace, good humor and civility. I will miss him. (And didn’t we have fun?)”

Charles was a committed environmentalist who became active in Sierra Club after retir-



Charles Price (left) with Roger Diedrich at the Mile Long Petition event outside Dominion Energy's Richmond office protesting the Wise County Coal Plant in May 2008 (photo courtesy of Glen Besa).

ing as the superintendent of education for what is now the Virginia Department of Corrections, where he was a tireless advocate for education opportunities for the incarcerated. One of his last conservation efforts was the establishment of the Cannon Creek Greenway in Richmond, a portion of which was renamed in his honor just last year. Charles worked with the City of Richmond to re-

cruit inmates in the city jail interested in learning landscaping job skills for developing the greenway.

Charles was a consummate manager, and changes in the Chapter’s administration bear his mark to this day, including the format of our Chapter ExCom agendas. Before joining the Chapter leadership, Charles had already left his mark on Richmond. Battling some city officials who saw city parks as little more than open land for development projects, Charles pushed for the city to place conservation easements on the parks to be held by land trusts. First working with Friends of Bandy Field to fight off development, Charles then pressured the city council to agree to an easement on the property that prevented future threats. Similar

easements have since been extended to other parks including the city’s James River Park and, most recently, Larus Park.

Observing the valuable cast offs by University of Richmond students at the end of each academic year, Charles was instrumental in organizing “The Big Yard Sale” while chair of the Falls of the James Group. “Charles’ Army” of volunteers all wearing red t-shirts would gather and sort through and organize the stuff for resale, consistently generating more than \$10,000 annually for the Falls of the James Group. This all-volunteer event continues to this day.

In September of 2011, Charles’ outstanding contributions to the Sierra Club were recognized when he was invited to San Francisco to receive the national Sierra Club’s Special Achievement Award.

Charles’ good humor was infectious, and it lightened the serious business of environmental advocacy. During his four years as Chapter chair, we carpooled with Charles to most of the Chapter ExCom meetings at Ivy Creek Park in Charlottesville. We remained friends after his term as chair, sharing the occasional dinner out with his wife, Phyllis.

We miss you Charles, and we know those of you who recall memories of Charles do so as well. Farewell, dear friend.

Glen Besa is the political chair and Tyla Matteson is the York River Group chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Welcome new Chapter chair, Joe Brancoli!

After serving as Chapter vice chair for 2 years, Joe Brancoli, a Richmond native, has offered to step up and serve as acting chair and lead our executive committee.

He may not like the limelight, but Joe is more than capable and continues to impress us with his thoughtfulness, humility and creativity. Not to mention he’s a pleasure to work with given his great sense of humor and wit. Sometimes a reluctant leader is just what you need!

Virginia Sierran

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<https://sierraclub.org/virginia>

The Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club is over 20,000 members strong. We are your friends and neighbors working to build healthy, livable communities and to conserve and protect our climate and environment. The Virginia Chapter is part of the national Sierra Club, the nation’s largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.

Information about our staff, executive committee and environmental action chairs can be found on the Virginia Chapter website under “About.”

Virginia Sierran Editor: Sevim Kalyoncu, editorvirginiasieran@gmail.com

The editor welcomes editorial contributions, photographs and art work. Submissions should pertain to Virginia’s environment and/or climate change. Email the editor with questions on submissions.

Please contact member.care@sierraclub.org for membership and mailing issues and address.changes@sierraclub.org to change your mailing address.

New staff update

by Tim Cywinski and Kelsey Crane

We're delighted to announce the addition of two new staff members, Gretchen Goeke Dee and Paige Wesselink.



Gretchen Goeke Dee

Gretchen is serving as the outreach coordinator for the Stop the Pipelines campaign in southwest Virginia. Gretchen has been involved in the fight against the

Mountain Valley Pipeline since 2016 as well as a number of other local fights against injustice. She will be working closely with Lynn Godfrey and in coordination with Beyond Dirty Fuels to organize opposition to the Mountain Valley Pipeline and support directly impacted community members.

Gretchen brings years of experience from working in Blacksburg and alongside other communities to oppose the Mountain Valley Pipeline through community outreach, direct action, mutual aid, student organizing and demonstrations. She received a bachelor's in wildlife conservation and a master's in biogeography from Virginia Tech.

Paige joins the Virginia Chapter staff as a digital outreach coordinator and lead organizer



Paige Wesselink

for the Ready For 100 Virginia campaign. Paige graduated with a double major in sociology and environmental studies from Roanoke College in 2019. She previously worked with our team as the communications and community outreach intern.

Most recently, Paige worked

as a campaign organizer for Nextgen Virginia, where she engaged people across the commonwealth to elect progressive candidates. She has a deep love for the Virginia community and is passionate about protecting our planet and building an equitable environmental movement. Paige is a self-described river rat and a native to Richmond.

Both Gretchen and Paige are passionate about grassroots activism and are fantastic additions to the Chapter. We are confident that they will serve as an asset to our larger mission and make a positive impact on the climate justice movement.

Tim Cywinski is the communications manager and Kelsey Crane is the campaign and policy director of the Virginia Chapter.

Lack of compliance with the Environmental Justice Act

by Gustavo Angeles

As the restrictions due to the pandemic continue in the state, the citizen boards (Water, Air and Waste Management) continue holding regular meetings during business hours and the Department of Environmental Quality continues offering comment periods for 30 days, unless people request longer times. All this is happening digitally.

The main problem with this practice is that it is not equitable. While it seems convenient to be able to participate in meetings over video conference, it does imply that participants need to have access to a reliable internet or phone service. In Virginia, this is only available in most urban areas. Most of the state's rural areas do not enjoy these services, making it hard for residents to be able to express their voices. The

"accommodations" due to the pandemic are not helping those communities. On the contrary, they are negatively impacting rural communities more than usual.

My question is, why do residents and community members always have to lose? For business, the process is more convenient; the staff or representatives do not have to travel to a meeting. Permit applicants continue having meetings with DEQ at the same rate, while the community only has one listening session, now online, for a couple of hours after the permit is drafted.

Last year, with the passage of the Environmental Justice Act, new definitions and concepts were added to the code, and one of those is "meaningful involvement." "Meaningful involvement" means that (1) affected and vul-

nerable community residents have access and opportunities to participate in the full cycle of the decision-making process about a proposed activity that will affect their environment or health and (2) decision makers will seek out and consider such participation, allowing the views and perspectives of community residents to shape and influence the decision.

This policy has not yet been implemented by DEQ. Since the Environmental Justice Act became law in July 2020, there have been two permits. One came in front of the Air Control Board for the Naval Shipyard Combined Heat and Power Plant, which was approved. The other, which came before the Water Board, concerns the Wegman's Distribution Center, located in the Brown Grove community, and it

was also approved.

Later this year the Air Control Board will be looking at another permit related to the MVP. I have no reason to believe that non-compliance with meaningful involvement will be considered a basis for denying the permit.

If you talk with your elected representatives, please let them know that the required compliance with our Environmental Justice Act is not happening during the permitting process at DEQ. Also, when you submit comments to any of the permits at any of the public citizen boards, request that they comply with the new definitions in the Environmental Justice Act.

Gustavo Angeles is the environmental justice program coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.

A new day

by Kate Addleson

Across the commonwealth this winter, Sierrans were showing up for one another and putting pressure on public officials for key changes to advance clean transportation and environmental justice, stop the Mountain Valley Pipeline and other dirty infrastructure, reject a decades-long extension for the North Anna nu-

clear plant, hold the Forest Service to its word and challenge a new effort by the plastics industry to expand in our state—all despite and in the face of unprecedented circumstances as we continue to see the pandemic take its toll around the world.

Spring is planning season for the Chapter, when we chart the

course for our conservation campaigns, and with so many significant victories from last year to build on, the stage is set for further success. During March and April, our leaders and staff will be meeting to discuss our next steps on energy justice, electrification, community preparedness for flooding, clean transportation

and public transit solutions and more. We look forward to discussing these numerous, exciting opportunities to advance our vision with many of you and with our partners—groups across the state dedicated to acting on climate and advancing social jus-

See New day on page 5.

Uncovering Sierra Club's early history in our area

by Gary Kosciusko

As it has affected so many aspects of our lives over the past year, the coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on the Sierra Club's local outings programs. While the Club's administrative meetings could easily migrate to an online setting, it has been impossible to safely conduct in-person outings thus far. As of this writing, we are not expecting to resume in-person events until early July. This situation strikes at the very essence of what Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings is all about.

Faced with that stark reality, the SCPRO History Committee, formed in 2017 and announced in the winter issue of the Virginia Sierran of that year, has forged ahead with uncovering the rich history of our local outings program. Building on written documentation collected from 2008 to 2009 and electronically archived by then-SCPRO Chair Mike Darzi, the committee has continued adding to that collection.

Before the pandemic, in-person oral interviews of long-time outings leaders had been conducted to complement the document archive. Now, with in-person interviews being out of the question, the committee has turned to written questionnaires and online interviews via Zoom.

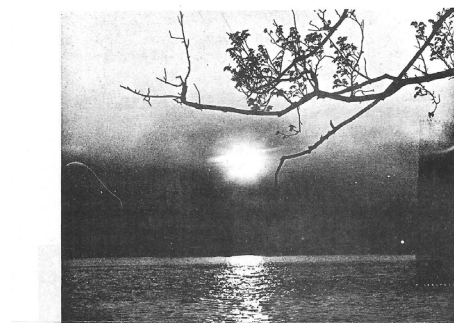
Rappahannock Group: Earth Day Events

by Paula Chow

Earth Day on the Rappahannock 2021, pandemic style, is quite creative with a week of activities without a single in-person festival. Virginia Chapter Rappahannock Group is one of seven sponsors of this year's festival.

A **Virtual BioBlitz, Sunday, April 11 – Saturday, April 17**, is focused on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area and during a specific time period. It is run through a free app, iNaturalist. Prizes can be won for the most observations recorded and the most identifications for Motts Run Reservoir, Alum Springs Park, Old Mill Park, Dixon Park and the City of Fredericksburg.

For the **Chalk and Talk Art Contest, Thursday, April 15 – Saturday, April 17**, folks create Earth Day-themed chalk art on



Potomac Estuary from Fort Washington

Potomac Sierran

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Acting Vice-Chairman: Irving Delappe
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Header for the first illustrated issue of the Potomac Sierran newsletter, November 1966 (photo courtesy of Gary Kosciusko).

The response has been gratifying, as everyone interviewed has been eager to tell us about their experiences. So far, 26 people have been interviewed and their edited transcripts produced.

Uncovering information about the formative period of the 1960s has been the most challenging. The '60s were turbulent times, politically and culturally, but they were also marked by heightened environmental awareness.

The Sierra Club leveraged that awareness by expanding nationwide and risked its tax-exempt status by challenging powerful interests. Fortunately, we stumbled on a 1988 letter written by George Alderson to Walter Wells that outlined that eastward expansion during the latter part of the 1960s.

With Larry Broadwell's help, we were able to get in touch with George, who now lives near Baltimore. It turns out that George first became intimately involved with the local activities of the Club in 1965, when those activities fell under the New York City-based Atlantic Chapter and the entire chapter had around two thousand members. As acting chair of the Washington Group in 1966, George also became the first editor of their Potomac Sierran newsletter. He went on to serve in many other local Club roles, including as the first chair of the fledgling DC-based Southeast Chapter, after it split off from the Atlantic Chapter in 1968. The new chapter included Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, District of Columbia, North

and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

Since this article is too short to mention all his accomplishments, suffice to say that the Club recognized George with a Special Achievement Award in 1968 and in 1982 interviewed him for its oral history program. In short, it was people like George Alderson who built the organizational foundations for the various chapters and groups we know today.

We continue to pose questions about that early history to George. He graciously lent us 29 newsletters and 6 other documents from the late 1960s so that we could scan them electronically. We believe the results of our interaction will provide information of value to numerous Sierra Club chapters and groups throughout the southeastern United States.

One open question he could not answer is when the Potomac Chapter split from the Southeast Chapter. If anyone has specifics about that event or wants more information about our SCPRO history project, we invite you to email us at NOVAHIKER@cox.net

Gary Kosciusko is the chair of Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings and its history committee.

Become a volunteer Virginia Chapter leader

by John Cruickshank

Goal setting and policy decision making for the Sierra Club are managed by volunteer leaders. All of the 12 regional groups as well as the Virginia Chapter are governed by executive committees (ExComs) that handle Club activities.

The Virginia Chapter ExCom has 8 elected at-large delegates and 1 delegate from each of our 12 groups. The at-large members are elected by the general membership and serve two-year terms.

The nominating committee is currently seeking candidates for the four at-large positions. Responsibilities include attending four ExCom meetings a year, participating in online voting when important issues arise and maintaining an understanding of the environmental issues in our

state. August 30 is the deadline for submitting a nomination.

All Sierra Club members are encouraged to take on a leadership role. Each autumn we hold elections for ExCom members to serve on state and local committees. Ballots can be cast online or through the mail.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a member of the Virginia Chapter ExCom, please contact me at jcruickshank4@gmail.com or (434) 973-0373. I will be more than happy to answer your questions.

If you would like to join the ExCom of your local group, please contact your group chair (listed on page 5 of this newsletter).

John Cruickshank is the chair of the nominating and election committee of the Virginia Chapter.

the trails. Prizes will be awarded.

Then at Old Mill Park, **Concert Night is April 16** with Cat's Meow and Darcy Dawn at 7:30pm. Gates open at 6pm. At 7pm RGSC will present its annual Living Green Award, which was established 11 years ago. Check the Rappahannock Group's Facebook page for the 2021 recipients.

Lastly, **Saturday Movie Night, April 17**, features "The Lorax." Gates open at 6pm.

For information and details on how to participate, go to <https://earthdayfred.com> and check for changes due to weather on Fredericksburg's Parks & Rec Facebook page. All events are free and open to the public.

Paula Chow is the program chair of the Rappahannock Group.

Great Falls Group programs

by Norbert Pink

General

• **Programs:** We are continuing our success with **Volunteer Action for the Environment** with a total of eight topic areas with an average of about 50 RSVPs per session. We also presented an excellent webinar on **Proposals to Reintroduce Red Wolves to Virginia** by Stephen Nash. We had about 60 people attend. These events are free and open to the public.

• **Realignment:** GFG is exploring modifying its management structure because of the realignment of the Fairfax and Prince William boundaries, which will include all Sierra Club members in those counties. Since the total members and geographic area will increase, we are exploring a new management structure that will establish a local subgroup for each county under GFG.

• **DC Environmental Film Festival:** This virtual festival is the largest environmental film festival in the world, showing over 100 films, and will be held March 18-28. GFG may hold a wrap-up discussion session in April.

• **Invasive Plant Study, HJ**

527: GFG worked with the Virginia Native Plant Society in getting a study approved to explore options for phasing out the propagation and sale of invasive plants in Virginia.

Fairfax County

• **Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CE-CAP)** held working group and public meetings and released three public surveys.

• **Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan (CARP) / Community Advisory Group (CAG):** The CAG will review and provide input on key deliverables throughout the CARP planning process. Ana Pradas has been selected to be the Sierra Club representative for the CAG, and an initial kickoff meeting will be scheduled soon.

• **zMOD:** Fairfax County has a project called zMOD to modernize its zoning ordinances. The community is concerned about the speed of updating this process but is working to address many environmental concerns within zMOD. GFG is focusing on well-water pollution, septic systems and improving transporta-

tion and open spaces in several large redevelopments that are in the planning stage now.

Loudoun County

Goose Creek: *SUCCESS* Loudoun citizens, including Sierra Club members, participated in getting the Loudoun Board of Supervisors to deny the Goose Creek Overlook application on March 16.

Prince William County

Independent Hill Small Area Plan: Prince William's citizens, including Sierra Club members, were not able to convince the Prince William Board of County Supervisors to deny this development application with their testimony at the March 16 board meeting.

More information relating to the Great Falls Group can be found at the Cascade newsletter archives. More details on these topics and other topics will be available at <https://bit.ly/3cljepf>

Norbert Pink is the chair of the Great Falls Group.

New day

continued from page 3

tice. We will be utilizing equitable collaboration processes that are inclusive, responsive and deliberative. If you are interested in participating, I encourage you to reach out to the organizers or volunteer leaders in your area. (Visit <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/meet-staff> for more information.)

As we continue working to realize our strategic vision, here are a few of the exciting initiatives we are launching and/or expanding:

• Be the most effective driving force for climate solutions in Virginia: Expanding on our commitment to equity, inclusion and justice with Anti-Racism Teams focused on internal and external actions that support learning and growth as we work to become a more effective, multicultural organization. (Read more about our commitment to equity at <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/our-commitment-equity>)

• Fully engage and empow-

er members to address climate solutions: Launching a state-wide Membership Committee, consisting of chairs from each of our 12 local groups and activity sections. This new structure will support locally informed member engagement strategies. (Members wishing to access their communication preferences or other personal settings, please visit <https://myaccount.sierraclub.org/MyAccountLogin>)

• Represent Virginia's population in order to better address climate solutions and environmental justice: Launching a Youth Leadership Council to provide a dedicated space and platform for long-standing youth leadership in the Virginia environmental community to develop priorities and advocate for policy change that reflect their interests. Young leaders are encouraged to apply now. (Details are at <https://vasierra.club/youngcouncil>)

• Empower and inform activ-

ists through innovative communication: Expanding our Grassroots Conversations, virtual forums designed to inform and engage advocates who power the climate movement in Virginia. Forums focus on topics related to Virginia's most pressing environmental challenges. (Visit <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/grassroots-conversations>)

Thank you for getting out there and making a difference in your community. We will come out of this trying time stronger if we continue to support one another. Whether it's via video conference, phone calls or socially distanced solidarity events, we are changing Virginia for the better! And, if you're ever unsure about how to get involved, don't hesitate to reach out. We appreciate you.

Kate Addleson is the director of the Virginia Chapter.

Group Directory

Groups are organized to conduct the work of Sierra Club in local areas, cities and towns.

The information listed below is for the chair of each group.

Information regarding groups' geographical area can be found on our website under Find a Group Near You.

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Fracking over the Taylorsville Basin

by Bill Johnson

The Taylorsville Basin stretches from just to the southeast of Richmond, up across the Chesapeake Bay into Maryland. It is mostly rural, home to many farms and small towns. It sits atop the Potomac Aquifer, the only source of groundwater for many Virginians. Over 88,000 acres of land was leased for fracking in King George, Caroline and Westmoreland counties. David Spears, state geologist of the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, published a presentation about gas drilling in the Taylorsville Basin. You can find it here: <https://vasierra.club/frackingdrilling>

Next time someone wants to lease their land for fracking, there are some things that everyone should think about:

• **Orphan wells:** The number of abandoned fracking wells continues to increase significantly as companies abandon wells, leaving them vulnerable to leaching chemicals and gas into land, air and water. Taxpayers are stuck with the bill as many companies simply declare bankruptcy and forfeit their nominal bond rather than pay the costs of cleanup.

• **Health problems:** A significant increase in fracking-caused health problems affect nearby residents, from asthma and pregnancy risks to cancers.

• **Eminent Domain:** The taking of an unwilling landowner's property for use in building pipelines is ubiquitous today, especially if the ultimate destination for the gas crosses state lines. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, or FERC, sets the rules for building the pipeline in those cases, and it has been pro-pipeline in the past. All fracking wells are hooked together via pipelines, as shipping natural gas via trucks or trains has had explosive results. Even if you refuse to allow fracking on your land, the power of eminent domain can be used by the government to dig a gas pipeline across your land and through your streams.

• **Ecological disasters:** We should not move forward with an industry that can poison our air, water and land by extracting, shipping via pipelines and burning natural gas. Chemical waste from fracking must be dumped somewhere, whether it's left in

exposed local pools where it eventually drains into the land and water or it's shipped to a central location through local populations. In almost every case, local health officials and first responders do not know the actual chemicals used in fracking, as they are declared proprietary trade secrets, free from disclosure. As a result, they cannot prepare for a disaster until it occurs, and that is assuming that the well owner is still in business to tell them what is involved and what to do.

Virginia has no water treatment plant that can clean fracking wastewater, so it has to be injected into the ground. Fracking and injection wells both have been shown to increase the number and severity of earthquakes. In addition, the entire life cycle, from extraction through transportation to ultimate burning, releases greenhouse gases methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which has been proven to cause our overheating climate crisis.

• **Exorbitant costs:** The cost of extracting, shipping and building plants to burn fracking-based gas and oil, without even con-

sidering health impacts from the resulting air, land and water pollution, far exceeds the ever-lowering cost of producing cleaner energy. So who will pay for these significantly increased prices in a territory controlled by a utility monopoly? Users, for sure, not shareholders.

In contrast, clean energy doesn't exacerbate the greenhouse gas problem, nor does it have the deleterious health impacts. Recycling can take care of end-of-life equipment issues, and in its worst environmental disaster scenario, the entire clean energy industry could never have the disastrous ecological impact of a Fukushima or Chernobyl. But switching to it could stop causing a worsening climate.

So the counties where fracking was proposed have dodged a bullet. King George, Caroline and Westmoreland Counties need to be vigilant and ensure that the industry doesn't resurface and destroy their homes.

Bill Johnson is the fracking issues co-chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Transit equity study

by Kelsey Crane

One of the most exciting success stories for Virginians in the 2021 legislative session is House Resolution 542, Public Transit Equity Study, introduced by Del. Delores McQuinn. Public transit is a vital and necessary service for basic mobility in Virginia. Unfortunately, many of our transit systems have not been funded properly to meet the needs of current and future riders, including accessibility. Persons with disabilities can achieve greater freedom when they have full access to a variety of transit modes. Expanded access allows mobility and independence in their daily lives. But this can only be achieved when the pathways to transit—the infrastructure and conditions in the built environment—allow full access to transit stops, stations and vehicles.

Public transit supports equitable growth of the commonwealth's economy and transportation infrastructure and can curb climate-disrupting carbon emissions. The Sierra Club is a national partner in an emerging National Campaign for Transit Justice (<https://transitjustice.org/>), which has a simple motto, "Transit is Essential. Justice is Crucial."

Good, abundant local public transit services unlock freedom of movement for residents. Important access to jobs, schools, healthcare, recreation and services is created through public transit. But good transit is very scarce in the United States today, and inequities exist in services, with lower-income communities often receiving less in resources and funding. We can support

transit that is equitable, sustainable and affordable.

As a result of HR 542, the Department of Rail and Public Transportation will conduct a two-year study of transit equity and modernization in the commonwealth, with emphasis on transit services and engagement opportunities for underserved and underrepresented communities. The study will gather current data on transit accessibility, adequacy of transit infrastructure, transit electrification, implementation of emerging technology, transit safety and transit system engagement. Getting people out of cars and using public transportation is one of the best ways to cut pollution and carbon emissions from transportation. Having a baseline of where improvements are needed will position Virgin-

ia's Department of Rail and Public Transportation to focus future investments appropriately. Conducting the analysis through an equity lens is critical. This study, combined with future advocacy for where to direct funds will result in tangible improvements in our transit system and for riders.

Top 10 benefits of public transportation (From American Public Transportation Association):

1. Cleaner air: Public transportation reduces air pollution. Buses emit 20% less carbon monoxide, 10% as much hydrocarbons and 75% as much nitrogen oxides per passenger mile

See Transit equity study on page 10.

2021 legislative recap

by Bob Shippee

On February 27, after marathon 13-hour sessions of the House and Senate, a General Assembly session unlike any other adjourned. A “short” election-year session conducted virtually, it presented us with challenges of limited accessibility to lawmakers and limited ability to voice legislative positions via Zoom. Despite these challenges, we achieved significant wins while also experiencing a few disappointments. Connor and I thank the Legislative Committee and staff for their tremendous work in this session.

Wins

The major victories this year came in transportation. Clean Car Standards (Bagby-HB1965) is a significant step in addressing the massive automobile emissions problem. A broad coalition succeeded in removing opposition from auto dealers and manufacturers. More electric vehicles (initial 8% target) will be on their way to Virginia, clearing our air and reducing fossil fuel dependence. A program establishing EV Rebates (Reid-HB1979) passed but was unfunded in the budget. Advocates will implore the governor to allocate money to the fund. HB1979 was vital to gaining auto dealers’ support of HB1965. McQuinn-HJ542, a

Clean Transportation for All priority, will fund a two-year, \$500,000 Department of Rail and Public Transportation study of transit modernization and equity needs, including real-time bus tracking, benches, lighting and analysis of bus lanes and electrification. HB2118 (Kearney) and SB1380 (Lucas), the electric school bus bills, were decided in the session’s final hours. We supported HB2118 and opposed SB1380 as drafted. HB2118 passed, establishing a fund to electrify buses. Virginia can now receive potential federal electrification money.

SB1380, the “Dominion bus bill,” easily passed the Senate but was amended in the House due to pressure from the environmental community. We joined the eventual conference committee, and after negotiation with Dominion, language declaring the project in the public interest was removed and State Corporation Commission authority was enhanced (our Legislative Committee’s conditions), allowing us to declare a bill position of neutral. In the final hour of session, SB1380 died on a 46-46 vote. The vote was reconsidered and the bill amended to state that Dominion would not own the buses, but a fatigued chamber killed it 41-49, ending the electric bus

saga of 2021.

Another top Chapter priority was reforming the way in which Virginia updates its building codes (Kory-HB2227). Going forward, Virginia’s Board of Housing and Community Development must consider standards through the lens of long-term energy savings and health benefits to the resident, not just builder profit, when updating residential codes. While the final language is less far-reaching than hoped, the Chapter was pleased to work with the patron and stakeholders to reach this compromise.

A priority of the Beyond Coal Campaign was the Percentage of Income Payment Program (Kory-HB2330). HB2330 enables implementation of the PIPP created as part of the Virginia Clean Economy Act. Qualifying Dominion and ApCo customers will be able to reduce their energy burden and benefit from energy efficiency measures.

A multi-year effort to ban polystyrene containers (Styrofoam) culminated in passage of HB1902 (Carr), beginning with chain restaurants and including all establishments by 2025. This is a significant advancement in the clean-up of waterways littered with these non-biodegradable containers.

On the pipeline front, SB1265 (Deeds) reforms the stop-work order process for pipeline projects, and SB1311 (McClellan) improves pipeline accountability. SB1311 was the product of negotiations by Connor, App Voices, Southern Environmental Law Center and Wild Virginia to resolve the Department of Environmental Quality’s concerns. It requires companies applying for future pipeline projects to submit complete erosion, sediment control and stormwater management plans, strengthening Virginia’s authority over its water quality.

Lastly, SB1319 (Hashmi) passed, adding independent experts, Environmental Justice Council and impacted community members to DEQ’s Solid Waste Management and Diversion Task Force. Unfortunately, the Senate stripped out a proposed moratorium on new landfill permits sought by impacted communities.

Disappointments

Six utility regulatory reform bills passed the House but failed in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee. Chapter priority HB2048 (Bourne) would have allowed customers the right to buy renewable energy and could have helped tackle concerns regarding the energy consumption of expanding data centers. Five bills seeking to restore SCC rate review authority and ensure that utility customers receive full refunds of over-charges also failed in Senate Commerce and Labor Committee.

Another disappointment was that the Fossil Fuel Moratorium (HB2292-Cole) and Green New Deal Act (HB1937-Rasoul) were not given a hearing in the House.

A surprise bill, HB2173 (falsely called “advanced recycling” but actually chemical conversion) died in the House, but the Senate then took hostage HB1902 (Styrofoam ban) and forced the House to hold an up-or-down vote on passage of HB2173’s Senate companion, SB1164, before allowing HB1902 to pass. In the end, stakeholders determined that we could not risk losing the Styrofoam ban and create rifts with key legislators, and the chemical conversion bill passed in exchange for a HB2173 enhancement to include governments, schools and nonprofits.

Lastly, while bills to advance environmental justice in policy-making (SB1318 and HB2074) passed the House, they hit hurdles in the Senate, with opposition by Sen. Mason and the Virginia Manufacturers Association. The Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice established last year would have become law and defined “cumulative impacts” for state agencies.

As always, if you have any questions about our legislative work, feel free to contact Bob at rsoxbob@gmail.com or Connor at connor.kish@sierraclub.org

Bob Shippee is the legislative chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Volunteer spotlight: Karen Campblin

by Cheri Conca



On January 28, 2021, the Virginia General Assembly passed House Joint Resolution No. 635 commending Karen Campblin for her significant contributions toward the advancement of environmental health and racial equity.

Karen is an urban planner who serves as Transportation

and Smart Growth co-chair of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, co-director of Green New Deal Virginia, Environmental and Climate Justice chair of the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP and president of the Fairfax County NAACP.

The Fairfax Board of Supervisors named Karen the 2020 Sully District Community Champion for her work on the county’s Tree Commission, Land Unit J Study-Task Force and Joint Environmental Task Force, citing her tireless efforts to combat climate change in Northern Virginia and beyond.

Cheri Conca is the conservation program coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.

Building back better with offshore wind

by Hunter Noffsinger and Eileen Woll

With clean energy initiatives growing in Virginia and across the country, there are more and more ways to get involved in advocating for them, especially at the federal level. With the Biden-Harris Administration focusing on “building back better,” there is a lot of attention on the climate crisis. One of the aspects of the Build Back Better plan is rebuilding the economy in a safe and equitable manner with a move to 100% clean energy. From investing in infrastructure and electrifying the transportation sector to establishing the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council, the Biden Administration is showing its commitment to a cleaner future.

With an administration more focused on the climate crisis, we are seeing a number of clean energy initiatives at the federal level. One such initiative is the Offshore Wind Jobs and Opportunity Act (HR 998), which creates a job training grant program aimed at developing or improving educational and career training programs to provide individuals with the skills needed in the offshore wind industry. The program will provide funding for colleges and universities, state and local governments, unions and nonprofits

to create curriculum, health and safety programs and internships that would aid in the development of this new workforce. With climate change and COVID-19, we must continue to support our most vulnerable communities by providing opportunities for them to enter into the clean energy workforce. Making these training programs available and more accessible is the first step in rebuilding the economy in a safe and equitable manner.

“We need greater investment in low- and no-carbon generating capacity and workforce development efforts to support the jobs this change will create,” said Congressman A. Donald McEachin, one of the original cosponsors of the Offshore Wind Jobs and Opportunity Act. “Since my time in the Virginia General Assembly, I have fought to expand the development of offshore wind capabilities, and this bill will provide individuals, particularly those from low-income communities and communities of color, with the skills and training necessary for employment in this important industry.” The bill prioritizes grants to community colleges, organizations that service minority populations and those helping workers from other industries transition to

the offshore wind industry.

Virginia was first in the nation standing offshore wind turbines in federal waters. With the larger Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project, Virginia is hot on the trail to another record—the nation’s largest offshore wind project—as the development is on schedule to erect 180 turbines off our coast starting in 2024, with the full 2,600 megawatts of power delivered to over 650,000 Virginia homes by 2026.

Especially with its port and maritime assets, Virginia could also lead the nation in readying a large and diverse workforce supporting not only our Virginia project but also offshore wind projects up and down the Atlantic coast. The opportunity is huge as offshore wind has the potential to generate more than 2,000 gigawatts of power per year—nearly double the nation’s current electricity use—according to the U.S. Department of Energy. That’s enough to power 648 million American homes with clean, renewable electricity. Developing just 4% of this wind resource would support 160,000 jobs and generate a \$70 billion offshore wind business pipeline in the U.S. by 2030.

The list of opportunities as-

sociated with offshore wind is almost as massive as the wind turbines themselves—from project managers making on average \$62,304 to wind technicians making \$54,300 and machinists making almost \$44,000, and more. According to the Workforce Development Institute, there are 74 different professions necessary to build an offshore wind farm alone.

The building block on which all these careers start is education, as the majority of the jobs require an associate degree or trade school certification. Investing into our community colleges and training academies, as the Offshore Wind Jobs and Opportunity Act does, is a great first step. You can support this legislation and a clean energy future by contacting your federal representatives and asking them to support the Offshore Wind Jobs and Opportunity Act!

Hunter Noffsinger is the Hampton Roads community outreach coordinator and Eileen Woll is the offshore energy program director of the Virginia Chapter.

Virginia Chapter email lists

Join these email lists to get more informed about and involved with Virginia Chapter activities:

Virginia Climate Movement

This is a statewide list of people active in the Virginia climate movement. You can receive and send emails on climate-related news, events, webinars and actions going on across the state. *Monthly call on the fourth Tuesday at 12 p.m. and 7 p.m.* **Contact Mary-Stuart Torbeck at mary-stuart.torbeck@sierraclub.org**

Virginia Environmental Justice

Join our email list to work towards achieving environmental justice in Virginia. Our purpose is to identify environmental justice communities across the state, to develop EJ leadership, to provide room at the table for these organizations in statewide policy discussions and to share resources. *Monthly call on the second Wednesday at 11 a.m. and the second Thursday at 5:30 p.m.* **Contact Gustavo Angeles at gustavo.angeles@sierraclub.org**

Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Equity, Inclusion and Justice

This space is for asking questions, voicing concerns and sharing ideas as we move forward in our work to create a more equitable environment and chapter. **Contact Gustavo Angeles at gustavo.angeles@sierraclub.org**

Hampton Roads

Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in Hampton Roads. **Contact Ann Creasy at Ann.Creasy@sierraclub.org** or visit <https://vasierra.club/hr>

Richmond

Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in the Richmond metropolitan area. **Contact Tim Cywinski at tim.cywinski@sierraclub.org** or visit <https://vasierra.club/rva>

Northern Virginia

Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in Northern Virginia. **Contact Cheri Conca at cheri.conca@sierraclub.org** or visit <https://vasierra.club/nova>

Towards brighter futures with shared solar

by Ann Creasy

With new shared solar policies underway in Virginia, we will see more opportunity for shared solar projects. This means that a wider range of people will be able to access the benefits of solar.

First things first, what is “shared solar”? Shared solar, also referred to as community solar projects, are solar installations that several individuals co-own. In other words, the power output

from the installation is divided among multiple “subscribed” individuals. This is a great option for those who otherwise might not access residential rooftop solar to participate in clean energy. Participation in solar means savings and local economic development. Shared solar means that lower-income people who have not had enough up-front wealth to reap the benefits of clean ener-

gy and have been missing out on savings and benefits, now have a chance to get involved.

Historically, solar has been predominantly owned by white, middle- to upper-income individuals with homeownership. This disparity in ownership of solar for lower-income and non-white people speaks largely to issues of access due to systemic racism that restrict household income and ability to own a home. This injustice is further compounded by the energy burden experienced in low-income households. We have opportunities to improve these situations through shared solar and appropriate funding to mitigate energy burden.

In addition to outright savings for subscribers, shared solar can create funding for a variety of community benefits. Money used to build community and shared

solar projects would also benefit renters and those living in low-income housing, helping to reduce their energy bills while creating new revenue streams for communities.

Visit <https://vasierra.club/sharedsolar> to ask your federal representatives to support more funding for shared solar and energy efficiency programs, especially for low- to middle-income communities. To become more involved with solar advocacy work in Virginia, please contact me at ann.creasy@sierraclub.org

Ann Creasy is the Hampton Roads conservation program manager of the Virginia Chapter.

Plastics industry greenwashing scores big in the General Assembly

by Glen Besa

The plastics industry has a publicity problem. From the plastic bag litter blowing around our communities to the microplastics in the food we eat, the industry is getting a well-deserved black eye.

Enter “Advanced Recycling” which is neither advanced or recycling, but it apparently sounds good to a majority of Virginia state legislators.

This General Assembly saw the passage of a plastics loophole in our solid waste management laws for waste facilities that are little more than toxic belching plastic cookers, aka, pyrolysis (extreme heating) plants. Virginia can expect five or six of these plants according to Brett Vassey, president and CEO of the Virginia Manufacturers Association. These LULUs (locally undesirable land uses) will likely end up in communities that are poor, rural or populated by people of color.

Just like incinerators, these pyrolysis plants are major hazardous air pollutant emitters. One air permit pending in Cumberland County for such a facility would emit three times more mercury than Dominion Energy’s Wise County coal-fired power plant, along with arsenic, lead, formaldehyde and prodigious amounts of toluene. In fact, more than 90 tons per year of hazardous air pollutants, as classified by the EPA, would be unleashed on this poor rural county that is more than 30% African American.

If you are interested in joining the fight to oppose these toxic

belching plastic cookers, please contact Glen Besa at glenbesa@gmail.com

Glen Besa is the political chair of the Virginia Chapter.

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June 19-20 ... Charlottesville, VA

Brought to you by Matthew Rosefsky, Geo Medic, street medic, SOLO Instructor-Trainee, SC Outings Leader and Volunteer Strategist for SC National “Outdoors for All Campaign.” See <https://solowfa.com> for more information and online registration.

Lambert Compressor Station continued from page 1

the land. He suffers from asthma.

Their eloquent and charming manner is mesmerizing when listening to them telling the oral history of their beloved land and how the MVP is marring it with land disturbance activities and making it impossible for Anderson to cross from one part of his property to another. The fumes and toxic smells from the existing compressor stations' operations make just taking a walk unpleasant.

They also reminisce about the loss of family members and friends from cancer. Although, dismissed by the MVP as normal, the rates of cancer within a 1-mile radius of the proposed site are elevated above regional and state averages according to the EPA Environmental Justice Screen. They, as well as other residents of Chatham, state they have only heard from the MVP since De-

ember of last year.

Meaningful outreach to impacted communities is one of the chief tenets of environmental justice. MVP, per the advice of the Department of Environmental Quality, commissioned an independent environmental justice assessment of the area last spring and summer that noted significant lack of meaningful engagement due to several factors: the COVID pandemic hammering movement; the racial and social upheaval after the George Floyd murder; and local commemoration of the civil rights events around Bloody Monday in Danville in 1963, which resulted in several African Americans being arrested and attacks that garnered national attention at the time. Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, along with other partners and organizations, sent DEQ a letter outlining this and other inadequa-

cies and calling for further review.

The consultant submitted a revised and reworded environmental justice assessment but with the same discrepancies between it and the MVP rendition. DEQ extended the comment period 30 days.

The Lambert Compressor Station's purpose is to compress fracked gas for transport to the Southgate spur pipeline in North Carolina. The problem with that is MVP still does not have a permit from the North Carolina DEQ to cross the state's waterways to build this pipeline.

Albeit their appeal of the state's water permit denial in the summer of 2020 was granted on March 11 of this year by the U.S. Court of Appeals of the Fourth Circuit, the court found that it was within the authority of the North Carolina DEQ to issue the water permit denial. The court, however, remanded the state's water denial for a review of the administrative process of the initial denial.

The Lambert Compressor Station, while in Virginia, is part of the Southgate pipeline project in North Carolina and must have an air permit from Virginia DEQ to initiate construction. The pub-

lic comment period has been extended from a March 10 deadline to an April 9 deadline.

Elizabeth Jones eloquently sums it up this way:

"As a Black woman, when I heard the MVP wanted to take our land to build this fracked gas pipeline, my first thought was 'here we go again,' because this is one more example of the disparities and injustices forced upon my community by systemic racism. This is a civil rights matter because polluting corporations like MVP plot and plan for their futures but don't care that we have futures, too.

The MVP makes me frightened for the physical safety of my family, but the farm has been in our family for 98 years, so I know this long and ongoing struggle to preserve the property rights of African Americans is nothing new. The threat of this dirty, dangerous project has already caused our property value to depreciate, but we will never let it devalue our identity, culture and heritage."

Lynn Godfrey is the community outreach coordinator of the Stop the Pipelines campaign of the Virginia Chapter.

Transit equity study continued from page 6

than an automobile with a single occupant; and electric buses are now available, creating opportunities to make transit systems even cleaner.

2. Less traffic congestion: Public transportation can convey many more people in much less space than individual automobiles, which helps to keep traffic congestion lower, which in turn reduces air pollution from idling vehicles and helps riders avoid the stress that comes from daily driving in highly congested areas.

3. Creates jobs: Every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates more than 50,000 jobs.

4. Supports local business: Every \$10 million in capital investment in public transportation yields \$30 million in increased business sales.

5. Health and safety: Traveling by public transportation is 10 times safer per mile than traveling by automobile.

6. Saves households money: A household can save nearly \$10,000 by taking public transportation and living with one less car. The average household spends 16 cents of every dollar

on transportation, and 93% of this goes to buying, maintaining and operating cars, the largest expenditure after housing.

7. Reduces fossil fuels: Public transportation's overall effects save the United States 4.2 billion gallons of gasoline annually.

8. Increases home values: According to the American Public Transportation Association, residential property values for homes located near public transit with high frequency service performed 42% better on average.

9. Climate solution: Communities that invest in public transit reduce the nation's carbon emissions by 37 million metric tons annually.

10. Mobility and social opportunity: Public transportation provides personal mobility and freedom for people from every walk of life. Access to public transportation gives people transportation options to get to work, go to school, visit friends or go to a doctor's office.

Kelsey Crane is the campaign and policy director of the Virginia Chapter.

Digital Newsletter Announcement by Tim Cywinski

Exciting news! All Virginia Chapter members who can receive email will now receive a digital version of the newsletter in their inbox. Though this edition of the Virginia Sierran is being delivered via both mail and email, those who can receive a digital copy will no longer receive a paper copy unless they opt-in with the form described below. This change does not impact those who cannot receive Chapter emails or those who did not sign up to be included on the Chapter email list. You can also see what category you fall into by visiting your account preferences at <https://vasierra.club/account>

The transition to a digital version of our quarterly Virginia Sierran makes our newsletter easier to access, more efficient and

more environmentally responsible. Even in digital form, the content will continue to be as exciting and informative as ever.

All future newsletters can also be accessed on our Chapter website under the Resources menu.

If you would like to continue to receive a paper copy delivered via mail, please fill out the form found at <https://vasierra.club/papercopy>.

Please note that a member ID number is required to opt-in for the paper copy so we can verify membership.

Tim Cywinski is the communications manager of the Virginia Chapter.

Transportation legislative wins

by Kelsey Crane

2021 was a big year for clean transportation in the Virginia legislature. As a result of the legislation that has passed, Virginians will enjoy safer options to bike and walk, more equitable and modern transit systems, greater access to electric vehicles and more localities investing in public transit and affordable housing. The effects of air pollution from transportation and climate change are disparately impacting Black Virginians, Indigenous communities and Virginians of color, so it must be a top priority for climate solutions to directly address inequities. These policies mean cleaner air for Virginia's communities and new clean industry job opportunities.

This is a win powered by grassroots action. Thousands of supporters emailed, called, tweeted, held virtual meetings with their representatives, wrote letters to newspapers and showed up for lobby days to show the overwhelming support for this important legislation. Through the Sierra Club, supporters sent over 1,300 emails to their representatives and over 250 people attended different webinars and events.

Right before crossover (when the House and Senate exchange bills for review and action), grassroots supporters met with at least 40 of their legislators during a virtual Clean Transportation Lobby Day to advocate, share their personal stories and show their support for fossil-free transportation. Over 65 physicians and nurses sent a Health Professionals Clean Vehicles Support Letter

to the House and Senate supporting the Advanced Clean Car standards, electric school buses and the strengthening of public transit systems as solutions to address the health impacts of air pollution from transportation.

Climate and environmental justice advocates, health professionals, small businesses and even auto dealers were among the many supporters. The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus made environmental justice and transit a priority, including the passing of the Clean Cars Bill establishing regulations for low- and no-emission vehicles; a study on transportation equity, efficiency and modernization; pipeline accountability; oversight and protection of Virginia's water; and improving community and environmental justice outreach from Virginia's environmental regulators.

The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter worked alongside a large coalition of partners including the Virginia Conservation Network, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, League of Conservation Voters, Generation 180, Southern Environmental Law Center, Natural Resources Defense Council, the Nature Conservancy, Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Mother's Out Front, Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, New Virginia Majority, Virginia Organizing, Virginia Grassroots Coalition and more. Thank you to every single person who took action in getting these bills to Gov. Northam's desk and creating a cleaner, more just

transportation system for all Virginians.

What Sierra Club-supported bills passed for clean transportation in 2021?

HB 1965 (Bagby) is a huge win for climate action, adopting the Advanced Clean Car Standards in Virginia and setting the strongest possible standards for smog-causing (criteria) pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.

HB 1979 (Reid) creates a state electric vehicle rebate of up to \$2,500; however, the program will only proceed upon its funding by state or federal sources.

HR 542 (McQuinn) directs the Department of Rail and Public Transportation to conduct a two-year study of transit equity and modernization in the commonwealth, with emphasis on transit services and engagement opportunities for underserved and underrepresented communities.

HB 2118 (Keam) establishes an Electric Vehicle Grant Program to award grants to school boards for replacing all existing diesel school buses with electric school buses no later than 2031.

SB 1223 (Boysko) amends the Virginia Energy Plan to include an analysis of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and other infrastructure needed to support the 2045 net-zero carbon target in the transportation sector.

HB2282 (Sullivan) provides protection for ratepayers and ensures decarbonization of Virginia's single-largest source of carbon—passenger vehicles. It is being facilitated by the State Corporation Commission in a way

that also displaces electric utility co-option of this crucial climate action wedge.

HB 2053 (Samirah) develops a stakeholder advisory group in the Department of Housing and Community Development, allowing for more engagement and community input on housing and development issues.

HB 2054 (Samirah) waives parking requirements and ratios in comprehensive plans, allowing for a larger focus on transit-oriented development.

HB2262 (Hurst), Safe Bicycling, requires the driver of a motor vehicle to change lanes when overtaking a bicycle or certain other vehicles when the lane of travel is not wide enough for the overtaking motor vehicle to pass at least three feet to the left of the overtaken vehicle.

HB1841 (Keam), Zebra Crosswalks, directs the Commissioner of Highways to convene a working group to determine whether there should be model policies for crosswalk design and installation and, if so, to establish recommendations for such model policies.

HB 1903 (Carr), Traffic Calming, allows local governing bodies to reduce the speed limit to less than 25 miles per hour, but not less than 15 miles per hour, in a business or residence district.

Kelsey Crane is the campaign and policy director of the Virginia Chapter.

Equitable transit

continued from page 1

area includes the community of Gum Springs. In existence for over 186 years, Gum Springs is the oldest African American community in Fairfax County and is home to 2,500 people. Nearby Engleside Trailer Park and Ray's Mobile Homes would also be impacted. Residents fear they will be displaced by higher density dwellings that could house a new influx of people, such as employ-

ees of Amazon's headquarters in Arlington. One proposal for the Embark project would tear down some Gum Springs homes to build townhouses. Because of existing regulations, the owner of this property has the right to redevelop this land without the approval of the county or engagement with the residents.

The ink is not yet dry on plans for the Embark project, and there

is still time for public input. Local elected officials and housing agencies say they are committed to preserving and adding affordable and workforce housing. Going forward, new transit projects must include plans to preserve existing communities as a first step.

We may not depend on transit ourselves, but we all depend on those who need it: health

care workers, grocery store employees, restaurant servers and more. It is up to all of us to speak up for transit systems that take people to where they need and want to go rather than remove the very people who are most dependent on them.

Cheri Conca is the conservation program coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.

Make 2021 your year to go solar

by Ivy Main

If you have a sunny roof but no solar panels yet, this is your year. Late last year Congress extended the solar investment tax credit, so Uncle Sam will pay 26% of the cost of any facility installed by the end of 2022. In 2023, the credit drops to 22% and then disappears for residential solar after that, while the credit for commercial projects drops to 10%.

The steadily declining cost of solar panels also makes them a smart investment even if you have to borrow to finance the purchase. Cash buyers are seeing payback times under 10 years, which is not bad considering that high-quality panels carry a warranty of 25 years and may continue producing electricity indefinitely thereafter.

Still, it's a major purchase, and many people don't know where to begin or who to trust. Two non-profits in Virginia work to take the mystery out of the process and deliver cost savings through group purchasing. Solar



A Northern Virginia home with solar panels (photo courtesy of Susan Stillman).

United Neighbors of Virginia, or SUN, runs solar co-ops in different parts of the state. The co-op members select the products and installers and negotiate a discounted price. Electric vehicle chargers are now usually offered as well. Residents who want to go solar on their own can be-

come members of SUN and get expert one-on-one guidance.

Solarize Virginia also offers group purchasing opportunities mainly in the Piedmont area and in Northern Virginia, where it partners with the Northern Virginia Regional Commission as Solarize NOVA. Unlike with SUN co-

ops, with Solarize it is the experts at the nonprofit who select the installers and negotiate pricing. A new sign-up period will begin in April. Meanwhile, its website offers pricing and other information that can help you start planning.

Sierra Club members have a third option for discounted solar. Our national office has negotiated a partnership with SunPower that offers members a \$1,000 rebate and also provides the Club with a \$1,000 donation for every system sold. SunPower panels are considered among the best, but the company contracts with local installers, and the website won't reveal pricing until you fill in your information. If you go this route, be sure to compare prices and ask around about the reputation of the installer so you become a satisfied customer.

Ivy Main is the conservation and renewable energy chair of the Virginia Chapter.

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Go solar in 2021