

Rockville Environment Commission
Draft Minutes of Thursday, January 6, 2026
Virtual, 7:00pm – 9:00pm

Meeting Attendance

Commissioner	Present	Commissioner	Present
Jen Hawse	X	Pavitra Srinivasan	X
Deborah Landau	X	Summer White	X
Cindy McCabe	X	Vacancy	
William McClain, Chair	X	Vacancy	
Clark Reed	X		

City Staff: Amanda Campbell, Staff Liaison; Erica Shingara, EMD Chief, Holly Simmons, Community Planning and Development Services; Shaun Ryan, Community Planning and Development Services

Guests: Max Sanborn, Sean Paul

Council: Councilmember Van Grack

Meeting Commencement, Welcome Attendees: Chair McClain convened the meeting at 7:01 pm and welcomed attendees. Mr. Reed will chair the second half of the meeting as Chair McClain has a previous commitment.

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes: The agenda was approved with the change of moving the Chair Report to the first half of the meeting. December meeting minutes were approved with one minor change.

Community Forum – Max Sanborn and Sean Paul introduced themselves.

Zoning Ordinance Re-Write Draft

Community Planning and Development Services staff Holly Simmons and Shaun Ryan presented an overview of the proposed changes in the Draft Zoning Ordinance Re-Write (ZOR) and the related Forest and Tree Protection Ordinance. The ZOR update process began in 2023. Ms. Simmons previously introduced the ZOR update process to the Environment Commission in November 2024. The draft map and zoning ordinance was released December 4, 2025, for public comment. Several hearings and work sessions are scheduled with the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Council. After incorporating revisions, adoption is tentatively planned for late spring 2026. The zoning ordinance and map are some of the main regulatory and policy vehicles for implementing the Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2021) and the Town Center Master Plan (adopted 2025).

Environment Commission potential areas of interest include:

- Uses & Use Standards, specifically:
 - Electric Vehicle Charging (Sec. 25.6.7.7; Sec. 25.6.2.2)
- Landscaping and Screening (Div. 25.8.6)
- Certain subdivision standards, specifically:
 - Floodplains, dam inundation, and sediment control (Sec. 25. 12.5.7)
 - Tree planting* (Sec. 25.12.5.8)

- See also solar canopies over parking lots

Key links and how to submit comments:

- Zoning 101 video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxzV4RnuF68>
- Orientation to the Zoning Ordinance ReWrite Comment Process recording <https://rockvillemd.webex.com/recordingservice/sites/rockvillemd/recording/c61465a53d1a40cc9113c1033597a6f4/playback>
- Highlights: City of Rockville Staff Draft Zoning Ordinance <https://engagerockville.com/25887/widgets/88678/documents/75891>
- Zoning Map: Interactive webmap, [here \(External link\)](#). Static versions of the Staff Draft maps without the interactive features, they can be seen [here](#).
- Draft Zoning Ordinance feedback form [here](#). Draft Zoning Map feedback form [here](#).
- If the Commission decides to submit a joint comment letter, that can be sent by email.

The Planning Commission is expected to make recommendations regarding the Zoning Ordinance February 25. The last work session at the Planning Commission is February 11. Mayor and Council work sessions occur April to May. Comments could be received in advance of the Planning Commission meeting February 25 or later communicated to the Mayor and Council.

The Forest and Tree Protection Ordinance (FTPO)

New state regulations in the Forest Preservation and Retention Act of 2023 (Senate Bill 526) required the City to update its policies and plans on forest and tree mitigation. Additional forested areas will now need to be mitigated if cleared. Exemptions are included such as in designated transit-oriented development areas and near solar installations. Mitigation requirements are also shaped by priority retention areas and the presence of environmental features.

Chapter 10.5 proposed revisions contain a lower size threshold for significant trees that require mitigation, reducing the diameter at breast height to 6 inches from previous 12 inches. This change results in many more areas requiring mitigation. The Mayor and Council also expressed an interest in codifying a minimum percentage of native species required for trees planted under the FTPO. The revisions require that at least 80% of trees planted to meet forest conservation must be native. The Environment Commission inquired why the standard was not 100%. Staff noted this provides substantial ecological and environmental benefits while accommodating the Master Street Tree Plan and providing flexibility, especially for locations where a native species may not survive or be suitable for harsh urban conditions.

Next the city will be updating the Forest Conservation Manual, updating the Landscape and Lighting Manual (Div. 25.8.7), and Environmental Guidelines (Div. 25.8.9). The Environment Commission will be able to provide input as drafts are developed in the coming year or two. Staff reiterated that comments on revisions to the Zoning Ordinance, Forest and Tree Protection Ordinance, and related documents are welcome.

Chair Report

Welcome to 2026 – The chair asked members to reflect on ongoing projects and whether there are any other priorities related to the Climate Action Plan. This year the methane project is expected to be ramped up. Zoning Ordinance feedback

- Maryland Legislation
- Environmental Awards

- Stream Clean-ups
- REC Budget (if needed)
- City Budget
- Methane Detection
- Salt Testing
- Farmer's Market
- Coming soon: Green Space Management Plan, Flood Resilience Plan
- Three members' terms expire February 1 – reminder to re-apply
- Reminder to continue recruiting new members

Mayor and Council Report

Councilmember Van Grack emphasized that timely recommendation of environmental bills to support in the Maryland General Assembly is helpful in meeting the legislative process deadlines. Many bills were pre-filed and hearings will be held in the next few weeks. The Mayor and Council values the Environment Commission input.

Maryland Legislative Priorities

Discussion included following a bill related to portable solar, the re-introduction of the transportation climate alignment act and the bottle deposit bill, data center strategies to identify ways to offset demand, ways to ensure energy utility bill affordability, any bill that might help offset the ending federal tax credits, and efforts to stave off cuts to the Strategic Energy Investment Fund caused by state budget shortfalls.

Montgomery County Green Bank

Cindy McCabe described the offerings at the Montgomery County Green Bank, a 501c3 organization funded by the County and Exelon merger settlement funds. The Green Bank has focused on financing and enabling energy projects to help meet the County's greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, and is now expanding into resilience.

The Green Bank's focus has subsidizing technical studies and audits, offering low interest rates, and leveraging funding from other banks or from the equity in the property. They also offer favorable loan terms, including length, debt service money on hand. They are currently partnering to assist 55 non-profit communities with commercial solar. The Green Bank will give a presentation at the Montgomery Energy Summit this spring.

Although federal rules prohibit the Green Bank from lending to residents, the Green Bank provides funding for residential programs, for example, through Maryland Clean Energy Center, energy efficiency loans with Clean Energy Credit Union, and solar programs such as with Climate First Bank. In 2026, in light of the end of residential solar tax credits, they plan to continue to offer power purchase agreements, leases, and battery backup financing for residential solar. The Bank is supporting Community Solar as well, which is a way to access solar power without a roof.

Commercial solar projects are required to be installed by July 4, 2026 or energized by December 31, 2027 to take advantage of commercial federal tax credits that are winding down. Geothermal may have more potential that hasn't been explored as much as it could be. Commercial geothermal and battery storage tax credits may become the focus after next year since they continues for several years.

Committee Reports

- **Energy Committee:** The Energy Committee discussed potential Maryland legislation including ‘balcony solar’ which is allowed in Utah and Germany thus far. Other states are considering allowing 150-to-200-watt portable solar PV systems to be installed to cover some household electricity needs. The Committee hopes to launch methane detection activities with the public in March and asks members to continue to scope out parts of their neighborhoods that are good for detection.
- **Watersheds Committee:** The Watershed Committee discussed the salt data collection and what the data shows, whether it may indicate better salt application approaches over time, and how it could be used or displayed. Staff shared that the City is installing new telematics that can track salt application from City trucks over time, that staff participated in additional training and that the City is using brine more frequently to minimize the amount of salt needed for safety and clearing transportation routes.
- **Climate Action Committee:** CLAC has not yet met since the December meeting. The group plans to research Maryland bills and consider Bird City certification next steps. The next meeting is January 13.

Staff Updates

Program Updates

- The Plastic Bag Ban (with exemptions) went into effect January 1
- The MD Dept. of Agriculture public EV charger registration fees was paused until July.

Mayor & Council:

- Curbside Charging Agreement (TBD)
- International Green Construction Code (commercial) and National Green Building Standard (homes) (TBD)
- Climate Action Plan annual report (April)

New Business: No new business.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 9:02pm.