

COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSION, VALLEY

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



DATE:

Feb. 18, 2025

TIME:

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

LOCATION:

DEQ Valley Regional Office, 4411 Early Rd., Harrisonburg, VA 22801

MEETING PURPOSE

DEQ is hosting community listening sessions across the Commonwealth to gain local feedback on potential climate actions to be included in the development of Virginia's Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP). DEQ will gather and analyze all input received at these sessions to help identify community goals, challenges, and potential climate actions to reduce greenhouse (GHG) emissions statewide. This input will be considered holistically when developing the long-term plan.

AGENDA

This meeting consisted of an introductory presentation by DEQ staff, followed by a facilitated community discussion.

TOPICS
Introductions, Video, and Meeting Goals
Review of the Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP)
Overview of the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP)
Community Discussion and Group Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none">Discussion questions on potential GHG emission reduction measures

Wrap Up

- How to stay involved with DEQ throughout the CCAP planning process

MEETING SUMMARY

The Valley CCAP Community Listening Session was facilitated by DEQ's Air Division staff and began with an overview presentation of DEQ's climate planning efforts in Virginia. The first topic covered was a summary of the Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) published in February 2024. Topics covered in this section include:

- DEQ's public feedback during the PCAP planning process
- A summary of PCAP GHG emission reduction measures
- Overview of where Virginia's GHG emissions come from

Following the PCAP overview, DEQ staff presented on its current phase in climate planning: the 2025 Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP). Topics covered in this section include:

- What the CCAP is and what content will be included in the plan
- Who is providing input on the plan
- DEQ's engagement process and CCAP development timeline

After the presentation, DEQ staff guided both in-person and virtual attendees through an open discussion on various climate pollution topics to gain localized feedback to be considered as part of the CCAP.

DEQ sought public input on the following questions:

1. Which sectors (e.g., agriculture, transportation) are most important to you when reducing GHG emissions?
2. What specific actions are you already taking to reduce GHG emissions, or are already happening in your community?
3. What barriers are preventing you or your community from reducing GHG emissions?
4. What specific emission reduction measures do you wish were in place in your community, or for DEQ to consider in the CCAP?

After the discussion period, DEQ provided avenues for community members to stay engaged throughout the CCAP planning process, including through the CCAP Community Survey; the listening session feedback form; and the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) e-mail bulletin.

KEY TOPICS AND TAKEAWAYS

These notes reflect public feedback gathered during the Valley CCAP Community Listening Session.

The Valley CCAP Community Listening Session covered a wide range of topics in transportation, power, buildings, waste, and agriculture while focusing on benefits, opportunities, barriers, and concerns in reducing GHG emissions across the Commonwealth.

In **transportation**, participants discussed opportunities to reduce congestion and emissions through truck-to-train transit, expanded telework incentives, and increased alternative transportation options, such as walking, biking, and commuter rails. Attendees further noted the benefits of vehicle electrification, particularly for electric school buses. However, concerns were raised on the safety and accessibility of current city infrastructure that prioritizes passenger vehicles over walking and biking. Additional barriers to reducing transportation emissions across the state include: The time it takes to phase out gas-powered cars; lack of incentive to reduce personal vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT); and car-centric urban planning practices.

In the **power sector**, key opportunities were discussed to expand energy storage to meet rising energy demand. A major concern was the rapid expansion of data centers across the state and their large resource consumption.

Within the **buildings sector**, attendees identified opportunities to adopt more solar on rooftops and implement green infrastructure on local government buildings. Homeowners are also able to reduce GHG emissions by electrifying household appliances. However, high upfront costs often disincentivize property owners from taking action to adopt green energy solutions.

Waste and agriculture were noted as sectors where strong individual action can be taken to reduce emissions, such as through composting, recycling, and purchasing local produce. However, industrial agriculture emissions, recycling inefficiencies, and corporate greenwashing were identified as larger obstacles to reducing emissions statewide.

Overall, the conversation highlighted both innovative solutions and significant challenges in reducing climate pollution across sectors.

**Views and opinions expressed by public attendees during this meeting do not necessarily represent an official position or policy of DEQ. This summary is intended to provide a general overview of key discussion points provided by participants in the listening session. DEQ is capturing local feedback on potential strategies, opportunities, and challenges to reduce GHG emissions across the Commonwealth to inform the development of the CCAP.*

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. For forestry and land use sinks in the 2021 GHG inventory, are forests responsible for most emission reductions, or are there other natural lands incorporated into that calculation?

In Virginia, forests are the largest land-based carbon sink, but there are other natural lands accounted for in the inventory, such as urban trees, wetlands, and grasslands. There are also land-based activities that can emit rather than offset GHGs, such as when trees are removed for settlement or agricultural purposes.

2. Are heavily forested areas often removed for the development of utility-scale solar farms?

Various land types are used to develop utility-scale solar sites across Virginia, such as forests, croplands, and pastures. According to a December 2024 research report¹ published by Virginia Commonwealth University, ~50% of disturbed land cover for utility-scale solar development is categorized as forest land. However, the classification of 'forest land' is broad and there are varying values of conservation associated with lands in that classification.

3. Is there a quantified goal to reduce GHG emissions in the future?

DEQ has not set a specific GHG emission reduction goal as part of the plan, but there are various policies and goals already set that DEQ will consider, such as the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA). The Virginia General Assembly passed the VCEA (§56-585.5) in 2020, requiring Dominion Energy and Appalachian Power to meet carbon-free energy generation by 2045 and 2050, respectively. DEQ will also factor in the Virginia Energy Policy Goal (§67-102) to transition all sectors of Virginia's economy to net-zero carbon emissions by 2045. DEQ will test various scenarios to meet these goals.

4. For the transportation sector, what modes of transportation are included and how are emissions broken up?

Personal vehicles are responsible for over 50% of transportation emissions in Virginia. The transportation sector consists of all on-road and non-road sources, including light-, medium-, and heavy-duty vehicles, marine, aviation, and rail.

5. For the CCAP, how is DEQ expecting to see the most reductions in GHG emissions within the transportation sector (e.g., electrification, reducing vehicle-miles-traveled)?

There are many pathways needed to realize GHG emission reductions, including incentives for alternative modes of transit and fleet electrification. DEQ will consider the benefits, costs, barriers, and impacts of multiple emission reduction strategies needed to meet clean energy goals across all sectors.

6. Will the CCAP include any required or enforced actions to reach targets, or will it consist primarily of ideas or suggested pathways?

The CCAP is non-binding, with the goal of building a roadmap that could be used by various decision-makers across sectors to develop actionable programs and policies in the future.

¹ <https://energy.virginia.gov/renewable-energy/documents/Re-Evaluating%20Land%20Use%20Impacts%20of%20Utility-Scale%20Solar%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

7. What does the inter-agency coordination/input process look like?

DEQ will be modeling a similar interagency coordination process as was executed for the PCAP. Representatives from various agencies (e.g., the Department of Transportation and Department of Health), will be consulted to gain consensus on the direction DEQ is moving in for CCAP development. Agencies will also be asked to share relevant data sources, analyses, and current or future projects that may be incorporated into the plan.

8. Can you clarify who is included in the stakeholder group? Is the military considered in this group?

The stakeholder group consists of 34 representatives of various economic sectors in Virginia. This includes private organizations, non-profits, educational institutions, and grassroots organizations. The United States military is not a part of the stakeholder group. A complete list of stakeholder group representatives can be found on our website: <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/CPRG>.

9. Can individual Virginia localities impose regulations on the use of plastic bags?

In March 2020, the Virginia Legislature passed a bill authorizing “any county or city... to impose a tax of five cents per bag on disposable plastic bags provided to consumers by certain retailers.”²

**Note that any DEQ responses that were not able to be answered in full at the in-person meeting have been clarified and/or supplemented for the purposes of this document.*

MATERIALS SHARED

1. [Meeting Handouts:](#)

- Graphic of Virginia’s 2021 GHG emissions inventory
- CCAP content requirements
- Definitions of GHG emissions inventory sectors, with example emission reduction measures
- Discussion questions
- Glossary of commonly used terms and acronyms
- CCAP Public Participation Guide

2. [CCAP Community Survey](#)

3. [Meeting Presentation](#)

4. [Post-Meeting Feedback Form](#)

5. [Meeting Recording](#)

² <https://legacylis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+sum+SB11>

