

Testimony of

Marchant Wentworth
Wentworth Green Strategies

Before the

Committee on Transportation and Environment
District of Columbia City Council

Regarding the

Budget Oversight Hearing for the Mayor's proposed 2021 Budget

For the

Department of Energy and Environment

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This testimony is submitted on behalf of Wentworth Green Strategies, a nonprofit environmental consulting firm based in Washington, DC.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record for the Budget Oversight Hearing for the Mayor's proposed 2021 budget for the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE).

The Department performs a wide variety of functions taking on the roles of both state and local water and air quality regulator, stormwater manager and even wildlife warden. The Department regularly oversees the underground storage tanks, transport and disposal of hazardous waste, and the control of toxic substances. In addition, DOEE administers the implementation of the District's recent climate bill, the strongest in the nation, including the groundbreaking Solar for All program that furnishes solar panels to low income ratepayers to reduce their electric bills.

During this unique time, the Mayor and the Department deserve credit for crafting a budget that recognizes the budgetary pressures the city and its residents are subjected to while preserving the core of the important programs that protect our cities environment. In creating the operating budget, the Mayor, working with the Department, has apparently taken care to preserve programs that yield multiple benefits across several different issue areas. Importantly, they have done so while maintaining the staffing that are at the core for the Department's effectiveness to design and implement programs in the future when more resources may be available.

For example, the Solar For All Program helps the city achieve its ambitious climate goals while yielding concrete economic benefits for low-income ratepayers. Similarly, the Building Energy Performance Standard creates a fair and effective system of reducing energy use in our cities buildings while at the same time reducing air emissions in our central core – harmful emissions that can play a part in triggering asthma in some of our most vulnerable populations – seniors and children. Looking at the long term, this budget allocates money to set up the Green Bank that will provide financial mechanisms to move us toward a green economy during a time of recovery from record high unemployment.

While the Mayor apparently exercised some delicacy in creating the operating budget, unfortunately the same cannot be said for DOEE's Capital Improvements Budget. Almost every program, save the Hazardous Material Remediation Fund and the Flood Mitigation Model appear to be completely zeroed out for FY2021. Programs lost include waterway restoration, Chesapeake Bay Implementation, Clean Water Construction, Enforcement and Compliance, as well as the Kingman Island Education Center. Stream and Wetland Restoration Sustainable DC and Stormwater Retrofit were also completely defunded. These cuts amount to about \$35 million.

In examining this budget, the Committee on Transportation and Environment has an opportunity to set up a framework to determine lessons learned and ways to implement them. While no one knows what the future holds for the city, we do know that this threat, if there is any good to it, may allow us to look at opportunities to make our city more sustainable in ways we had previously not imagined. For example, can investing in expanding the use of telework change our transit patterns and improve the way our office buildings are operated? Will changes in commuter patterns affect how we use water and generate wastewater? The Committee may wish to provide resources to allow the Department to begin the job of centralizing some of the thinking that is already going on.

No one relishes the cuts in the budget that had to be made in accommodate the unprecedented demands on our government. But in evaluating each of the reductions, we ask the Committee to consider as a priority, programs that yield multiple societal and environmental benefits, some of which we mentioned at the beginning of this testimony. We would hope that in the event of additional resources being made available to the city from the federal government, the Mayor and the Department consider restoring the cuts in DOEE's Capital Improvements Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.