

February 23, 2023

Dear Committee of the Whole,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I serve as the District of Columbia Conservation Advocate for Nature Forward (formerly known as Audubon Naturalist Society). For 125 years, Nature Forward has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. Our Conservation priorities are human health & access to nature; biodiversity & habitat; fighting the climate crisis; and sustainable land use. The urgency of the climate crisis is evident across our country today, and that urgency underscores the importance of hearings like the one we are gathered for here today.



### **DC Must Enact an All-Electric Building Code to Achieve its Climate Commitments**

The Department of Buildings (DOB) plays a key role in implementing DC's climate commitments because DOB enforces DC's building codes. The Construction Codes Coordinating Board (CCCB) sets the building code. DOB has three members on the board and provides administrative support. The most recent building code, which came into effect in 2020, included a voluntary net zero energy code for commercial buildings. Net zero energy buildings are highly energy efficient and are powered by electricity from renewable sources. Net zero buildings do not burn fossil fuels.

Last year, the DC Council passed the Clean Energy DC Building Code Act, which requires a net zero building code for all newly constructed commercial buildings by 2026. The CCCB is the government body that is tasked with implementing the Council's directive for the net zero code. The CCCB is currently considering an all-electric commercial building code. Given the lengthy process of designing and codifying a new building code into law, this is the last code cycle that can be completed before the 2026 deadline for the net zero code that is required by law.

An all-electric building code would prohibit fossil fuel combustion in new buildings, but it does not have the energy efficiency and renewable energy requirements of a net zero code. An all-electric code is a logical interim step before the more stringent net zero energy code takes effect.

### **The Health Threat from Gas**

Gas appliances fill our homes with many of the same pollutants as car exhaust - things like carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), particulate matter, and formaldehyde.<sup>3</sup>



Because of this, the air we breathe indoors – where we spend 90% of our time – is often more polluted than outdoor air. Burning methane gas emits pollutants linked to heightened respiratory symptoms, asthma attacks, and hospital admissions. Children in households with gas appliances are 42% more likely to have asthma. Peer-reviewed research published this year found that gas stoves are responsible for 13% of all childhood asthma cases. Burning gas in buildings also releases benzene, a known carcinogen.

### **The Financial Threat from Gas**

Washington Gas has asked DC regulators for permission to charge DC residents \$672 million so the gas utility can dig up and replace its gas pipelines.<sup>1</sup> This is part of Washington Gas’s larger plan to charge DC residents \$4.5 billion to replace existing gas infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> Switching to electric heat pumps and water heaters would save 282,000 DC households \$100 million annually on utility bills. The savings are greatest for low to moderate-income households because they have three times the energy burden (the portion of their income spent on home energy) as wealthier households. DC families would save an average of \$378 a year.<sup>3</sup> Building homes with clean electric appliances is nearly always less expensive than building with fossil fuel appliances. Foregoing gas pipelines saves a median of nearly \$9,000. On the other hand, the Inflation Reduction Act includes billions of dollars for rebates and tax credits for buildings to use efficient electric technologies like heat pumps instead of fossil fuel burning furnaces, boilers, water heaters, and other equipment.

I urge the DOB representatives that serve on the CCCB to vote in favor of the all-electric commercial code at the upcoming CCCB meeting. And I ask the Committee of the Whole to remind the CCCB members that in taking their oath, they affirmed to faithfully execute all laws of the United States of America and the District of Columbia. The Climate Commitment Act of 2022 requires DC to achieve carbon neutrality and eliminate fossil fuel combustion by 2045. The Clean Energy DC Building Code Act of 2022 requires DC to end fossil fuel combustion in newly constructed buildings. Approving the commercial building code proposal currently before the CCCB is a step toward implementing Mayor Bowser’s commitment to carbon neutrality and a step to faithfully executing the laws of the District of Columbia.

Jamoni Overby

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<sup>1</sup> [Washington Gas filing before the Public Service Commission](#)

<sup>2</sup> [DC Government Testimony to Public Service Commission](#)

<sup>3</sup> Benefits of Household Electrification, [Rewiring America](#)

Nature Forward, DC Conservation Advocate





Second page