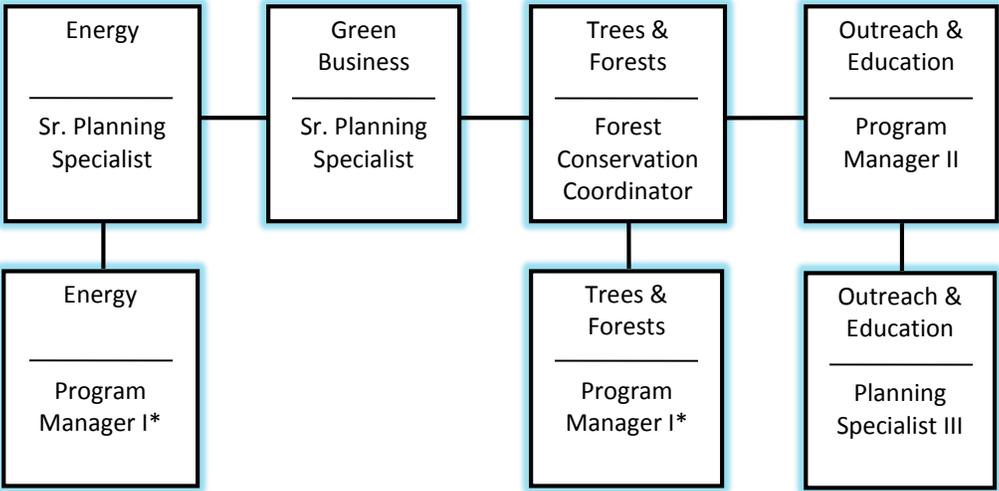


The Office of Sustainability was very active during 2015. Two new staff members were added to the Office, which is part of DEP’s Division of Environmental Policy & Compliance. Major programs related to commercial energy efficiency and trees were launched in 2015, and the groundwork was laid for expansion of these programs, and the addition of new initiatives, in 2016.

Office Structure

During 2015, the duties of the Office were being carried out through the positions shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 2-1
Staffing of the Office of Sustainability**



* New position in 2015

As noted in the 2015 Annual Report, although there are distinct initiatives in the energy, green business, and tree and forest program areas, every effort is made to connect these programs to one another, as well as to other programs within the Department of Environmental Protection (e.g., stormwater management, solid waste management and recycling, etc.) that are outside the purview of the Office but are integral to creating a more sustainable community. Individuals and businesses interested in reducing energy costs, for example, may be receptive to other activities that reduce their environmental footprint. The Office’s outreach and education programs endeavor to make these connections wherever possible.

The remainder of this section summarizes the activities of the Office of Sustainability during 2015.



Senior Energy Specialist Michelle Vigen works with property managers during a benchmarking work group.

Commercial Energy Initiatives

In Montgomery County, the commercial sector occupies 69 million sq. ft. of space, and uses an estimated 34 trillion Btu of energy annually. To serve this community, the Office of Sustainability implements a number of innovative nation-leading programs and policies such as building energy benchmarking, financing opportunities, and other educational efforts.

Building Benchmarking

In May 2014, Montgomery County adopted the Building Energy Benchmarking Law (County Bill 2-14). While fifteen cities and two states have benchmarking laws, Montgomery County is the first county in the nation to pass such a measure, which requires certain commercial building owners to report their building energy use annually for public disclosure.

Implementation of the Benchmarking Law is on-track and progressing smoothly. The Department of General Services (DGS) “led by example,” by meeting the first deadline in the Benchmarking Law, successfully benchmarking County buildings subject to the law, and disclosed the resulting data to DEP by June 1, 2015. DEP is preparing for the first private

building compliance season by establishing helpline processes and developing outreach materials.

Private buildings subject to the law are divided into two groups:

- Group 1 buildings (250,000 sq. ft. or greater) will report their benchmarking data to DEP by June 1, 2016, and every June 1 thereafter, for the previous calendar year.
- Group 2 buildings (50,000 sq. ft. or greater) will report their benchmarking data to DEP by June 1, 2017, and every June 1 thereafter, for the previous calendar year.

Buildings that are 50,000 sq. ft. or larger represent 75% of commercial floor space in the County. Jurisdictions further along in benchmarking show a conservative average energy savings rate of 2% annually. Similar results are expected in the County from the implementation of the Benchmarking Law.



The Benchmarking Work Group provided valuable information to participants.

Benchmarking Work Group

Section 2 of the adopted Benchmarking Law required the establishment of a Benchmarking Work Group, made up of a broad set of stakeholders including utilities, building owners, property managers, nonprofits, associations, and energy service companies. The Work Group

was charged with reviewing the County’s benchmarking process and providing recommendations on the Law’s implementation in the private sector, including any proposed legislative amendments, by June 2015.

The Work Group’s Recommendations were submitted to the County Executive and County Council, and the amendments passed unanimously in November 2015. DEP thanks all who participated in the Work Group process.

Compliance Assistance Programming – Education and Outreach

In 2015, DEP actively engaged the building owner community in Montgomery County well in advance of the compliance deadlines by holding a number of outreach and training events and developing resources to assist in the benchmarking process:

- **Benchmarking Ambassadors Training:** In April and October 2015, DEP and Montgomery College’s Workforce Development and Continuing Education hosted two Benchmarking Ambassadors training with 40 attendees. The Ambassadors received training on ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager® and a primer on the County’s benchmarking requirements, and are well-equipped to assist building owners comply with the Law.
- **Early Bird Benchmarking Recognition Event:** “Early Bird” organizations benchmarked and voluntarily reported 60 buildings to the County one year ahead of schedule, and their submissions represent more than 12 million square feet and more than 1 trillion Btu of energy. County Executive Isiah Leggett, Councilmember Roger Berliner, ENERGY STAR representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and DEP honored these Early Birds with a Recognition Event in September 2015 with nearly 50 attendees, hosted by the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce.
- **DEP Benchmarking Office Hours:** Starting in December 2015, DEP resumed hosting monthly Benchmarking Office Hours, an opportunity to discuss any benchmarking questions with DEP staff. Office Hours will be held in the months prior to the compliance deadline and are open to the public.



Business owners pose with County Executive Ike Leggett and Councilmember Roger Berliner during the Early Bird Benchmarking Recognition Event.

- **DEP Benchmarking Website:** As of January 2016, DEP’s Benchmarking Law resources website has received 1,814 unique pageviews since its publication in August 2014. DEP has also developed a number of outreach materials that are available for download from the webpage, including an official guidance document, reporting checklist, and list of frequently asked questions.
- **Benchmarking News:** The 573 subscribers of this newsletter receive a monthly email that includes program implementation updates, alerts about the availability of new materials, events, and BENCHMARKED profiles which highlights building owners who has already benchmarked their building. DEP is also piloting a Benchmarking Google Group for building owners to receive announcements, ask questions, and share lessons learned about benchmarking. This group currently has more than 70 members.

Partnerships

DEP’s Benchmarking outreach efforts would not be possible without the ongoing and proactive support of several key partners and national technical assistance organizations. In addition to sharing information with their networks, they contributed to the Work Group process, providing valuable information to DEP in developing the benchmarking program.

DEP has also contributed to, and benefitted from, associations and work groups with national organizations, nonprofits, and peer jurisdictions with similar benchmarking laws. DEP's involvement in these groups allows the County to access national tools and tailor the development of future resources to meet the needs of our local policy implementation:

- **Standard Energy Efficiency Data (SEED):** Montgomery County is proud to partner with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) on the SEED Collaborative. The County is part of a select group of state and local governments with similar benchmarking and disclosure programs. With the leadership and coordination of DOE, the County will be able to better collect and manage building energy data, and ultimately create new opportunities in energy efficiency with the SEED platform.
- **Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN):** In October 2015, DEP joined the USDN Work Group on Energy Reporting Ordinances. In this group, peer jurisdictions with building energy benchmarking and disclosure laws connect once a month to share lessons learned, ask questions, and share resources.
- **Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) Participation:** In June 2015, DEP joined two TAGs—one related to benchmarking and the other related to data-driven building analytics—to provide input and recommendations to DOE on the research performed by the Consortium for Building Energy Innovation (CBEI) in order to streamline and provide technical assistance to benchmarking jurisdictions.
- **National Building Labeling Working Group:** In August 2015, DEP was invited to and joined a working group, convened by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), to advise the development of a nation-wide building energy label, which will likely be founded greatly upon the benchmarking data being collected by benchmarking jurisdictions. This working group is part of the New York Reforming the Energy Vision (REV) Initiative.



Downtown Silver Spring.

Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Financing

On March 31, 2015, Montgomery County passed County Bill 6-15, Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy Program (PACE). This legislation allows for commercial and multi-family property owners to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades to commercial buildings and repay the costs as a surcharge/special assessment on the property tax bill. By eliminating upfront costs and providing low-cost long-term financing, PACE overcomes challenges that have hindered the adoption of energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

To facilitate a successful and robust PACE market in Montgomery County, the County elected to partner with a third-party program administrator and a County-designated lender. DEP worked closely with the Department of Finance on the solicitation for these two organizations. PACE Financial Servicing (PFS) was selected as the program administrator, while Greenworks Lending (GWL) was selected as the County-designated lender. DEP is working closely with PFS and GWL on program implementation, including identifying potential projects.

Starting in winter 2015, DEP has been aggressively pursuing pilot projects with motivated building owners while doing one-on-one training and education. Plans were developed for a phased outreach approach, including:

- **Introductory Preview Workshop (January 2016):** An introductory PACE training for a select group of motivated building owners and contractors to encourage additional pilot projects in advance of the public launch.
- **Building Owner PACE Open House (March 2016):** An open house hosted by PFS and GWL for interested building owners to learn about the benefits of PACE, and how to participate.
- **Montgomery County Energy Summit (April 2016):** A significant public launch to announce the red-carpet rollout of the PACE program, highlight completed projects in the County, and provide in-depth training for contractors, lenders, and building owners.

Montgomery County Green Bank

In June 2015, Montgomery County passed legislation (County Bill 18-15) to create a Montgomery County Green Bank. Montgomery County's Green Bank is the first formal green bank organization to be established at a local government level.

The Green Bank legislation provided for the establishment of an organization with the sole purpose of increasing investment and implementation of energy improvements across all sectors in the County. Once operational, the Green Bank will allow the County to offer additional financial products beyond PACE. Like the state versions it is modeled after, the Montgomery County Green Bank will seek to use its seed capital in innovative ways, to spur private capital investment, provide unique programs to target and open up new markets to energy-saving investments, and contribute to a growing regional market of energy financing in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

The County is supported in its efforts to develop the Green Bank by the Coalition for Green Capital (CGC), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is working at a variety of levels to establish a network of green banks. CGC provides pro bono technical assistance to the County, based on their experience assisting with the development of other green banks, as well as in depth research on the potential market opportunities in Montgomery County.



Jeffrey Schub from the Coalition for Green Capital was a featured speaker during the Green Bank Information Session.

In 2015, DEP led outreach programs to educate on Green Bank financing as well as to engage partners in the planning of the Green Bank:

- **Information Session:** On September 16, 2015, DEP hosted a Green Bank Information Session attended by over 120 stakeholders at the Fitzgerald Theater in Rockville. The program introduced the community to the County’s Green Bank legislation, provided an overview of how Green Banks can benefit the community, and invited participants to join the Green Bank Work Group. The event featured key speakers including Jim Barrett from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy and Jeffrey Schub from Coalition for Green Capital.
- **Work Group:** The legislation that established the Montgomery County Green Bank directed the creation of a Green Bank Work Group. The Work Group was charged with identifying best practices and local needs related to the County’s Green Bank, and providing recommendations by June 2016 on the implementation of the Green Bank,

including any necessary amendments to County law. The Work Group is supported by DEP, with assistance from CGC. The Work Group had a kick off meeting on October 28, 2015 with more than 45 individuals representing the broad base of stakeholders. The group was divided into three committees, focused on the areas of Governance, Fundraising, and Marketplace Development. As of January 30, 2016, each committee has met three times and are covering, in their respective committees, issues of mission, bylaws, operations, technical assistance programs, financial and non-financial market gaps, and funding for both operations and capitalization.

- Engagement: The twice-monthly Green Bank newsletter has 284 subscribers, and more than 50 individuals are on the rosters of the subcommittees, including several that are serving on two or more committees.



Residents were encouraged to show their favorite energy saving tips at the County Fair.

Residential Energy Initiatives

Montgomery County has more than 1 million residents and 360,000 households according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Households in the County consume roughly 5 million MWh of electricity annually as well as various heating fuels. DEP has a growing residential energy program to help County residents gain insights into their energy use profiles, reduce energy consumption, and take advantage of available incentives and rebates.

DEP continues to work to lay a foundation—similar to the approach taken in the commercial sector—that supports and encourages greater energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable energy within residential communities. To develop this foundation, DEP has partnered and collaborated with local and national organizations in the real estate and home certification arenas by increasing education and transparency about home energy performance.

These efforts will be enhanced by the addition of a Program Manager dedicated to residential energy programs, including efforts directed at low to moderate income populations. This new staff member is expected to come on-board in spring 2016.

REALTOR Education on Energy and Other DEP Programs

DEP has developed a close relationship with the Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS (GCAAR) and, since 2014, DEP has provided bi-annual continuing education courses for GCARR members on DEP's environmental programs. Energy is one of many topics covered in these courses, and helps familiarize REALTORS with the various third-party certifications and the valuation of energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Green Home Certification Disclosure

DEP is part of a collaborative, with the District Department of Energy and the Environment, the Institute for Market Transformation, PEARL Home Certification, GCAAR and MRIS (the local Multiple Listing Service organization), working to expand the use and display of third-party high performance home certifications. With support from the U.S. DOE, this effort elevates and validates the information provided by programs, such as Home Energy Score or utility energy efficiency programs, in the residential real estate market.

Home Energy Score

DEP continues to take steps to pursue a statewide program of Home Energy Score. Developed by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the Home Energy Score is similar to a vehicle's miles-per-gallon rating. It helps a homeowner or homebuyer understand how much energy a home is expected to use, and identifies opportunities for improving the energy efficiency of a home. Because the score is based on a standardized process, it allows for a comparison of the energy performance of a home compared to other homes nationwide. DEP has engaged the Maryland Energy Administration and the state's utilities on their interest in Home Energy Score. The Energy and Air Quality Advisory Group also hosted DOE and Pepco representatives for an overview of residential energy efficiency programs and their activities related to Home Energy Score. DEP will continue to work with all of these entities in an effort to develop a state-wide program, which will allow for greater cost-effectiveness and build the critical mass for the market transformation benefits of Home Energy Score.

Residential Engagement

In addition to working "behind-the-scenes" with local and national partners to develop a ripe market for residential energy data, DEP is also working to engage directly with County residents on energy matters. In 2015, DEP engaged with residents on energy conservation topics using social media, pilot programs, and email campaigns, and plans to expand these efforts in 2016.

Energy Heroes Pilot Program

In the fall of 2015, DEP piloted a residential engagement program, Energy Heroes, using social media to highlight, recognize, and reward residents in the county taking actions to save energy. Entrants were entered in a drawing and their stories were highlighted on the MyGreenMontgomery.org blog. Although the number of participants in the pilot was low, DEP will utilize the experience gained through the pilot to improve and expand this model for energy and other sustainability programs.

Energy News and AskDEP

DEP's energy team is committed to consistent and engaging communications with the community about its programs, activities, and stories of County residents and businesses saving energy or using clean energy.

- Last year, DEP launched the Energy News, a residential-focused, monthly e-newsletter that includes case studies on energy-saving and clean energy actions, energy-related events (such as solar co-ops), guest blogs from experts in the County, updates on sustainability initiatives, tips and tricks for saving energy, and opportunities, such as drawings and scholarships. It currently has 937 subscribers.
- Using its expansive newsletter distribution lists, DEP regularly updates subscribers about the active solar co-ops in the County. By advertising these opportunities, DEP assists with renewable energy awareness and solar expansion in the County.
- DEP takes advantage of opportunities to visit communities, and has made two such visits to two large multi-family communities. We hope and expect this aspect of our energy program to increase with additional capacity.
- Residential energy outreach also includes blogs and stories on the MyGreenMontgomery.org website and e-newsletter, as well as, DEP staff answering inquiries via email and MC311.



The Department works regionally to promote the expansion of renewable energy.

Regional Energy Programs

In addition to serving the commercial and residential sectors in the County, DEP is also involved in a number of other energy-related initiatives in the region, including promoting Maryland's EmPOWER programs, and supporting County and regional committees involved in energy efficiency and renewable energy activities.

Maryland State Policy Support

The County continues to offer support for the Maryland EmPOWER programs and the important role this program plays in helping residents and businesses save energy, keep energy costs low, and reduce carbon emissions. DEP has also contributed to state Public Service Commission processes for Residential Finance Programs and Community Solar, as well as participate, as relevant, in work group sessions.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Energy Programs

DEP benefits substantially from partnerships within, and with, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG). The DEP Director serves on the Climate, Energy and Environment Policy Committee, MWCOCG's primary policy group related to climate and energy, as well as the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee. An Office of Sustainability staff

member serves on, and currently chairs, the Built Environment and Energy Advisory Committee, which facilitates learning on topics such as residential engagement programs, energy financing, and engaging the commercial real estate market. Office staff also serves as part of the regional PACE Working Group.

Energy and Air Quality Advisory Committee

The Energy and Air Quality Advisory Committee (EAQAC), comprised of Montgomery County residents, is charged with advising the County Executive and Council on issues related to energy and air quality. DEP hosts and serves as staff liaison for EAQAC's monthly meetings, and provides staff support and assistance for EAQAC's initiatives.



Leaves from a fruitless sweetgum tree.

Tree Programs

In Montgomery County, many groups are working to raise the awareness of the benefits of trees, and to improve tree conservation through planting, long-term care, and retention. These groups include community-based volunteers like residents in Oakmont and east Bethesda who are helping neighbors get trees planted; non-profit organizations like Conservation Montgomery who are planting trees and running tree-care workshops; and Montgomery Parks who hosts outreach programs, maintains detailed webpages about trees, and has a robust tree care and planting program.

Departments within the Montgomery County government have several programs contributing toward this goal, as well. Through the County's Roadside Tree Law, the Department of Permitting Services is increasing awareness for all applicants for building, sediment control and erosion, and right-of-way permits by requiring tree save plans and mitigation for tree removals on all applications that impact street trees. Additionally, the Department of Transportation planted 1,700 roadside trees in 2015, a 50% increase over the previous year, supported in part by fees paid for mitigation under the Roadside Tree Law. Within DEP, trees have important roles in many programs, including stream restoration, green streets, and Rainscapes. All three departments maintain information and guidance about trees on their webpages.

In addition to a wide array of activities involving trees on public property in the County, the Office of Sustainability is developing a comprehensive program for residents and privately owned land. This program's primary functions are to plant and establish shade trees, increase awareness and long-term care of trees, and provide data management and mapping tools to track plantings across the County.



Tree Montgomery's inaugural tree planting was located at Round Hill Apartments in Chevy Chase. Pictured here are tree planting contractor staff from D&A Dunlevy Landscapers (left) and DEP staff (right).

Tree Montgomery

Tree Montgomery was launched in April, 2015. This comprehensive program builds on ground work begun in 2014. It provides free shade trees, planted and cared for, to private property owners in Montgomery County.

Tree Montgomery is funded through fees paid as mitigation for activities regulated by the Tree Canopy Law. The Law requires shade trees to be planted, or if the required trees are not planted for any reason, fees are paid into a dedicated “tree canopy” account. The number of trees to be planted (or the amount of fees paid) is based on the level of disturbance created by the development activity. By law, funds from the tree canopy account can only be used to plant and establish shade trees.

The Tree Canopy Law applies to development activities requiring a Sediment Control Permit (a permit required when land disturbance above a certain level occurs) that are not subject to mitigation requirements under the County’s Forest Conservation Law (FCL). In general, the FCL applies to larger development activities. As a result, small developers and custom home builders in Montgomery County contribute a substantial portion of the funding for shade tree plantings provided through Tree Montgomery.



Contractors plant a tree as part of the Tree Montgomery program.

During 2015, more than \$640,000 was paid into the Tree Canopy Account. Due to the gradual accumulation of funds in this account following the effective date of the new law, the FY15 appropriation for planting was \$50,000 and the FY16 appropriation was \$250,000. Both of these appropriations were exhausted by the end of 2015. A supplemental appropriation of \$350,000 from the tree canopy account has been requested for the remainder of FY16.

In the first spring of Tree Montgomery, nearly 50 shade trees were planted at two multi-family communities and two single family homes. Following these initial plantings, approximately 500 more shade trees were planted throughout the fall. During 2015, applications for shade trees plantings were largely processed in the order they were received. Even without efforts to target neighborhoods, the requests and plantings were concentrated in the highly urban areas of Montgomery County. Efforts are underway to target neighborhoods with high rates of development activity and those in need of shade in 2016.

The Office met with each applicant who received a shade tree through Tree Montgomery to jointly select appropriate planting locations and species, answer questions and provide advice about long-term care. Nearly 60 percent were planted on single family properties and 15 percent at multi-family communities, with the remaining planted at religious and non-profit organizations and open space in HOAs. More than 35 different species were planted and 85 percent of all tree planted were native species. All trees are protected from damage by deer. A majority of these newly planted trees will receive two years of aftercare including watering, structural pruning, mulching, and weeding; all at no cost to the property owners.

DEP continues to work in collaboration with the development and environmental communities on further opportunities to increase planting of trees. Areas of evaluation include the planting requirements under the Tree Canopy Law, providing credit for saving trees, and greater coordination between developers and the Tree Montgomery program to identify developed properties suitable for canopy trees.

More information and data about the Tree Montgomery planting program will be included in the annual report required by the Tree Canopy Law. This report will be submitted by the Office of Sustainability in spring 2016.

Education and Outreach

The Office continues to develop a robust outreach and education campaign. This is essential to tree canopy planting programs, as well as the overall goals related to retaining and caring for existing trees. In conjunction with communications consultants, the Office developed a detailed framework for a new website covering information such as the benefits of shade trees,

other planting programs available in Montgomery County, and an interactive map. The new website is targeted to launch in the summer of 2016. To assist with targeting neighborhoods and other high-priority areas for Tree Montgomery plantings, lawn signs and post cards regarding the Tree Montgomery Program were developed. These materials will be used to target certain neighborhoods in 2016.



Residents were encouraged to show their favorite reasons for why they love trees at the County Fair.

Data and Mapping

To streamline the Tree Montgomery program, automated processes for many aspects of the program were under development during 2015. These include improving the on-line application and creating an on-line signature process for the access agreements needed to conduct planting and maintenance activities on private property. Additionally, progress was made towards automating and streamlining data management and communications tasks across the program. These tasks include mapping locations for plantings; managing applications, invoices, and budgets; informing applicants of their progress; placing orders; coordinating with the planting contractor; and conducting post-planting inspections. For

example, staff will be able to approve applications for trees, convert them to orders and invoices, map planting locations, and add inspection results within a single field application.

A public-facing map is being developed to show all newly planted trees through Tree Montgomery and those planted to meet the requirements of the Tree Canopy Law. Additionally, DEP is developing an application to allow anyone to add a newly planted tree, including developers who plant outside of the requirements of the Tree Canopy Law. This will allow any interested party to follow the progress of plantings in the County. This feature is to be incorporated in the Tree Montgomery website targeted for launch in the summer of 2016.

Finally, the Office continues to work with the Department of Permitting Services to obtain information about the location and species of the trees planted by during development activity subject to the Tree Canopy Law.



A tree staging area for the Tree Montgomery program.



Business owners network before a Green Business press event.

Green Business Certification Program

The mission of the Green Business Certification Program is to:

- Empower businesses and other organizations to green their operations through tools, incentives, inspirational ideas, collaboration, and leadership opportunities; and
- Encourage local consumers and other businesses to consider Certified Green Businesses when making purchasing decisions.

It is both a voluntary recognition program as well as an educational program, as it provides businesses with a “greenprint” – a checklist of actions – for integrating sustainability into their day-to-day operations and corporate culture.

The Program is a partnership between the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and Montgomery College. It was launched in December 2009 in response to broad interest in establishing Montgomery County as a leader in environmental stewardship and sustainability. The program resulted from, and

continues to be shaped by, extensive collaboration with environmentally responsible business leaders and other stakeholders.

Certification was initially tailored to businesses in commercial office space to respond to the operational circumstances facing the majority of County businesses. Program eligibility expanded in the spring of 2013 with the creation of a tailored application for the landscaping sector.

In 2015 the Green Business Certification transitioned to an umbrella program in which businesses certified by national third party organizations are recognized. This has broadened eligibility, enabling the Program to reach virtually all types of businesses including restaurants, cleaning companies, hotels, home-based businesses and others. Program expansion will also increase consumer awareness, create more "green business-to-green business" opportunities, stimulate momentum in corporate sustainability, and help identify Montgomery County as a leader in the green economy.

Given the variety of businesses and their unique operations, businesses can now choose the certification program that is most in line with their operations and values. At the present time, business can choose from a number of different certification programs:

- Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection
 - Office Based Businesses
 - Landscape Businesses
- Green Seal
 - Residential Cleaning Services
 - Commercial Cleaning Services
 - Restaurants and Food Services
 - Hotels and Lodging
- Green Restaurant Association – Restaurants and Food Services
- B Lab – most businesses are eligible
- Green America (Gold) – most businesses are eligible

To date, the Green Business Certification Program has a network of 84 Certified Green Businesses. The number of certified businesses jumped from 50 in 2014 to 84 in 2015 (a 68% increase) because of the transition to an umbrella program.

Website Revisions

In 2015, DEP revamped its website to be mobile responsive with easier navigation and simplified directions. More importantly, it contains a number of [new resources](#), including “How To Guides” related to Creating a Green Team, Developing Sustainability Policies, Green Purchasing, and Continuous Improvement and Measurement, and includes a menu of Sustainability Metrics businesses can use to track their progress. The website also contains information on the national third party certification programs that are recognized by the Green Business Certification Program, [videos](#) profiling green businesses and an expanded [Green Business Directory](#).



The Green Business Forum facilitates discussions with local business leaders.

Green Business Forum

DEP’s partnership with the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce has been instrumental in advancing the Department’s green business development goals. Among the cascading benefits associated with the Green Business Certification Program has been the Green Business

Forum. Hosted by the Chamber, the Forum facilitates quarterly discussions on the benefits of greening business.

Since 2012, the Forum has convened 12 discussions, attracting significant attendance ranging, on average, between 30 and 60 individuals per event. Recent topics have focused on the County's energy benchmarking law, creation of the County Green Bank, and sustainability branding.

Technical Assistance

Currently, DEP provides free technical assistance and strategic advice to businesses committed to pursuing certification. DEP consultants are available to visit with interested businesses and their "green teams" prior to the submission of their application. Many businesses take advantage of this valuable service as it gives them an opportunity to work through a range of issues including the development of sustainability policies, identification of appropriate metrics, and the creation of a continuous improvement plan.

Outreach and Recognition

One of the most effective ways of communicating the benefits of certification is by showcasing best practices among Certified Green Businesses. This is done in several ways. Numerous videos profiling businesses appear on the Green Business program website at <http://www.mcgreenbiz.org/videos/>; a quarterly newsletter, sent to more than 1,000 subscribers, highlights businesses pursuing innovative and impactful measures; and the Green Business Directory (<http://www.mcgreenbiz.org/green-business-directory/>) offers businesses an opportunity to highlight measures they are taking to green their operations. In addition, Certified Green Businesses were individually featured last year on County Ride On bus public service advertising as part of the very popular "Get on the Bus" campaign.



An advertisement for the “Get on the Bus” campaign highlighting the County’s certified green businesses.



Events like the Montgomery County GreenFest are an important way to engage with residents, and we couldn't do it without help from our amazing volunteers.

Outreach and Education

The Office of Sustainability is dedicated to community engagement. Our goal is to connect residents and businesses to the programs, tools and financial incentives available to them, so as to make it easy and accessible for them to make environmentally-friendly choices. We achieve this through our My Green Montgomery web portal as well as attending and hosting community events.

My Green Montgomery

My Green Montgomery (MyGreenMontgomery.org) is a service to help County residents and businesses discover and share stories, ideas and resources for living a greener, more sustainable life in an economically vibrant community. Since its launch in 2012, the website has become a one-stop site for finding the latest green community events, financial incentives, suggestions of “do-it-yourself” projects, as well as green news and tips. The community blog is the most visited part of My Green Montgomery and features stories by community members, County employees, non-profits and businesses.

My Green Montgomery also serves as a communication brand of DEP, and is how people engage with DEP through social media.

The My Green Montgomery Website

In 2015, MyGreenMontgomery.org was redesigned for mobile responsiveness so that the public can easily access information “on-the-go” with an engaging blog design, search functionality, a new “Your Stories” blog feed and the elimination of the “Green Plan” registration. The website is more colorful, dynamic and easier to navigate no matter the device.

The site had over 35,000 unique pageviews in 2015, representing a 35% increase over 2014. The most visited pages included the blog search page, the calendar page, an article on GreenFest and an article on the RainScapes trainings for 2015.



Blogs

My Green Montgomery featured 102 blog posts in 2015 – a fourth straight year of increases in blogs. Twenty-eight of the blogs were written by guest authors, including 13 “Benchmarked” posts by local businesses and property management companies that have already gone through the process of benchmarking their buildings energy performance using EPA’s Portfolio Manager software. Guest writers included:

- Adventist HealthCare
- Brookfield Office Properties
- The Chevy Chase Land Company of Montgomery County, Maryland
- City of Takoma Park
- Ecobeco
- First Potomac Realty Trust
- Food Recovery Network
- Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake
- JBG Companies
- Montgomery College
- Montgomery County Department of General Services
- Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
- Montgomery County Public Schools
- Montgomery Parks
- Papa Johns
- Promark Real Estate Services
- Realty Investment Trust
- Roundpeg Benefit LLC
- Sustainable Maryland
- Tower Companies
- Washington Gas

Newsletter

The “Your Green Montgomery” e-Newsletter was launched in May 2013. Each month, the newsletter serves as a digest of the best stories of My Green Montgomery. In 2015, the newsletter was redesigned for easier readability and mobile responsiveness. In addition, a new section was added, titled “If You Do One Thing,” to focus the reader’s attention to the most important sustainability tip that month, such as testing the home for radon or installing LED lighting.

Individuals who signed up for Tree Montgomery were given the opportunity to sign up for the My Green Montgomery newsletter as well. With Tree Montgomery sign-ups and an increased presence on the newly redesigned MyGreenMontgomery.org, the newsletter now has 1,358 emails, a 289% increase over 2014.

Social Media

In 2015, the My Green Montgomery social media sites continued to grow and reach new audiences.

- Twitter: @MyGreenMC has 838 followers, a 37.8% increase over 2014
- Facebook: @MyGreenMontgomery has 607 likes, a 61.4% increase over 2014
- Instagram: @MyGreenMC has 71 followers, an 82% increase over 2014
- My Green Montgomery also maintains a Pinterest board of 174 pins on 7 boards, 6,138 photos on Flickr and 51 videos on the YouTube channel.

Events

Montgomery County GreenFest

The first annual Montgomery County GreenFest was held in March 2015. More than 700 people attended the event, which provided the opportunity to learn about the latest sustainability issues, share ideas on how to address them, and inspire the next generation to take actions for the environment.



Participants at the Montgomery County GreenFest filled out a survey of green behaviors.

GreenFest was held at Montgomery College Takoma Park/Silver Spring and the highlights of the day included:

- County Executive Isiah Leggett kicking off the day's activities
- More than 150 people viewing the Racing to Zero film
- 80 volunteers from Montgomery College and DEP's Stream Stewards who donated 275 hours to assist in the event's success
- Educational sessions on home energy, green living, food and life as an electric vehicle owner
- More than 75 kids taking part in an educational activity on lowering consumption
- Almost 80 exhibitors including nonprofit and for-profit organizations as well as government agencies

The event was organized as part of a public-private partnership between the Montgomery County Government, WSSC, Montgomery Parks, the cities of Takoma Park, Gaithersburg and Rockville, Montgomery College, the MCPS Outdoor Environmental Education Program, University of Maryland Extension, and local nonprofits, Bethesda Green, GreenWheaton, Silver Spring Green and Poolesville Green.

The 2nd annual GreenFest will be Saturday, April 30, 2016 at the Takoma Park Community Center from 11am – 4pm.

County Fair

As has been the case for many years, DEP was active at the 2015 Montgomery County Agricultural Fair. The Office of Sustainability partnered with the Divisions of Watershed Management and Solid Waste Services to promote a wide variety of sustainability programs, including:

- Steps to take to address residential energy efficiency
- Planting a tree through Tree Montgomery
- The importance of testing homes for radon
- Methods for controlling stormwater
- The County's 70% recycling goal

Over a nine-day period, more than 9,000 people interacted with DEP staff and the 154 volunteers that contributed more than 675 hours supporting DEP's presence at the fair. In addition, 207 compost bins were distributed to residents for use for composting yard trim materials in their backyards.



The trivia wheel is a popular attraction at the DEP tent at the County Fair.

General Events

In 2015, the Office of Sustainability continued to expand its presence at outreach and education events. Not including the County Fair and GreenFest, staff engaged with 2,703 people at events to talk about sustainability topics such as trees, energy, green business, air quality and My Green Montgomery. Events attended by Office of Sustainability staff included two GCARR educational classes, earth day events, Izaak Walton Hunting and Fishing Day, the Trees Matter Symposium, Bike to Work Day and civic association and HOA meetings. In addition, Office of Sustainability staff also participated in various events sponsored by the Divisions of Watershed Management and Solid Waste Services, supplementing their outreach related to stormwater management and recycling.