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Thursday, February 4, 2010

Councilmember Mary Cheh
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 108
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Councilmember Cheh:

This is to request that the Committee on Government Operations and the Environment, schedule a roundtable to consider remedies to reverse the dereliction of the Renewable Energy Incentive Program ("REIP"), established in the DC Department of the Environment ("DDoE"), pursuant to your Clean and Affordable Energy Act of 2008 legislation.

Councilmember Jim Graham, who represents our community and supports this legislation, has asked if his Committee on Public Works and Transportation can join with you in convening this roundtable.

In FY '09, the Mt. Pleasant Solar Coop installed 47 solar homes with 137 kiloWatthours of solar electric generating capacity -- a number we hope to double in FY '10. If we can get Net Metering, we can make renewable easily accessible to renters and small businesses. DC's residents and businesses could soon boast 70 megawatts of generating capacity! We are now working with Solar Coops in Capitol Hill and Georgetown and others in Adams Morgan, Brookland and Shepherd and Takoma Parks are forming.

We are asking your help in getting DDoE to hire staff to manage and administer the program. As you are aware, the program manager was reassigned in 2008. Two positions for REIP were announced in 2009, but no hires were made. It is disturbing to learn that although there were many qualified applicants, DDoE cancelled the announcement altogether.

More importantly, we need the Council to assure that *the \$2 million budgeted for REIP annually from the surcharge on DC rate payers' utility payments is allocated and spent on REIP.* In FY '09 only \$600,000 was disbursed (most FY '09 rebates were processed and disbursed in FY '10)) for the program, \$1.4 million was reprogrammed and has not been accounted for. These funds must be recouped. Furthermore, this year, as in FY '09, REIP funding has been "frozen" (a perennial reason for not hiring certain staff).

Here's what happens: applications go unprocessed for months at a time, so documents are lost routinely and repeatedly. Currently, there are 214 applicants, most of whom have heard nothing from DDoE, six months into the fiscal year. Applicants' rebates due before installations are begun may arrive as much as six months after the work has been completed.

There is a chilling impact: after six months of no contact, as many as half of our applicants may drop out. Others coming into the program decline when they hear about the agency's MO. In FY '09, many members had to liquidate retirement and other savings while waiting for their rebates. Many of our installers who hired staff to work with the FY '10 program have let those employees go. Some are restricting their work to MD and VA. Neighborhood Job Training programs we have worked with, like those at the Spanish Catholic Center, can't find solar installation jobs for their graduates.

The Mt. Pleasant Solar Coop stands ready to work with DDoE to make this a model program.

We look forward to discussing with you how such a roundtable can create such a rapprochement.

Sincerely,

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Anya Schoolman

President, Mt. Pleasant Solar Coop

cc: Councilmember Jim Graham