

Testimony—Budget Oversight Hearing DC Department of the Environment

Anya Schoolman April 30, 2010

President of the Mt Pleasant Solar Coop

Member of the Board of the Anacostia Watershed Society

Board member of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I grew up in Washington, attended Lafayette, Deal and Wilson HS and I love this town. As President of the Mt Pleasant Solar Coop I have worked to create a community organization that helps homeowners go solar, cut their carbon foot print and cut their Pepco bills. We are fighting for ways to make this option easily accessible and available to every citizen of DC.

We have worked to foster sister coops around DC and now count siblings in Petworth, Shepherd Park, Capital Hill, Georgetown and the Pallisades. Just last night I got a call from Brookland Civic Association asking my help to launch a Coop there.

This is a powerful, diverse and committed movement. Our goals have never been to get solar for ourselves—instead they have always been—to make solar available to every resident of Washington. Spend the money here at home. Build green jobs and build our communities.

I am deeply frustrated, in fact infuriated, at the Mayor's proposed 2011 budget cuts

I know these are tough times. I am a realist and a pragmatist.

But I want you, the DC Council, to understand, that what is at issue here is more than just a question of where to trim to make ends meet.

When the Council sets up a surcharge or fee for environmental purposes- such as the bag tax to protect the Anacostia River, or the surcharge on our Pepco bills to fund a wide range of energy conservation and renewable energy programs—these moves are not always popular with the voter.

How many of you have heard people grumbling about the bag tax?

Yet, for the most part, the public is willing to pay these small charges—because they know the money goes to good use.

A decade of empirical research at the National Park Service showed that people feel ok about an entrance fee at a National Park—if they know the money stays in the park. Yet, if the money goes to the general treasury people are angered to have to pay to visit a park.

The same principle applies here. You cannot take funds dedicated to the Anacostia River and use the money for street sweeping!! The same goes for the money pilfered from the Sustainable Energy Utility and the Renewable Energy Incentive Program-(REIP) that supports the extremely popular solar power rebate. These are not general funds. Until these problems are SOLVED, the money shouldn't be up for grabs. If you don't need the money to solve those specific problems— THEN GIVE IT BACK to the people.

On another level—the proposed cuts on the environmental program represent a key turning point in the City's future. I and thousands of people across the city have been donating our time for years, to help protect and restore the environment of Washington. We have been working to make the Anacostia someday fishable and swimmable and a treasure to enjoy within a livable and prosperous community. We envision, a Washington no longer dependent on dirty, immoral and toxic coal for power. We want a city where distributed solar power is available to any resident of the city—on their house or through community solar gardens. We see a Washington with green jobs here at home, where we create our own energy, not burn our money and send it up in smoggy smokestacks.

I ask the council to think hard, what road are we on?

If we are to build a clean energy economy—that benefits our citizens— here in this city. We need to stick to a plan. Not create institutions like the Sustainable Energy Utility and then defund them before they have even begun.

Why have we spent hundreds and hundreds of UNPAID, VOLUNTEER hours working to build solar coops, set up the Sustainable Energy Utility, pulling the trash out of the Anacostia, training and educating our youth if our Mayor and City Council will so easily, so lightly say – oh never mind.

These proposed budget cuts insult and disrespect the citizens and thousands of volunteers in this city. They are a slap in the face.

Your vote will tell us where you stand.