

## University Sustainability Council

### Establishing a Permanent Allocation from the University Sustainability Fund to Offset Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Undergraduate Student Commuting

#### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish guidelines for using revenue from the University Sustainability Fund, wholly supported through a mandatory fee paid by full-time undergraduate students, to purchase verified carbon offsets in order to achieve carbon neutrality for undergraduate student commuting in every year beginning with 2019.

#### Background

On October 15, 2018, leaders of the University of Maryland (UMD) Student Government Association (SGA) submitted a University Sustainability Fund proposal called *Eliminating the Climate Impact of Undergraduate Student Commuting*, which requests to use a portion of the University Sustainability Fund to offset greenhouse gas emissions associated with undergraduate students commuting to and from the UMD campus in personal vehicles.

On October 31, 2018, the SGA Legislature unanimously approved *An Act Supporting the 2018 University Sustainability Fund Proposal "Eliminating the Climate Impact of Undergraduate Student Commuting"* (SGA legislative document F 18-10-17 D). The Act requests that "the Office of Sustainability present a yearly report to the [SGA] Sustainability Committee on the carbon impact and cost of the program, and requests that the project is placed forward for formal review by the [SGA] Sustainability Committee every three academic years."

On November 2, 2018, the University Sustainability Council's Sustainability Fund Review Committee voted in favor of forwarding the proposal to the University Sustainability Council with the following recommendations:

1. Issue a University Sustainability Fund grant of \$50,000 in the current fiscal year to offset undergraduate student commuting emissions for calendar year 2018.
2. Reserve approximately \$50,000 each year from the University Sustainability Fund to maintain the program annually. The Sustainability Fund Review Committee should review the program and projected costs annually to determine the need for more or less funding and to form any recommendation to modify the established program cap.

On November 12, 2018, the University Sustainability Council voted in favor of issuing a University Sustainability Fund grant of \$50,000 to offset undergraduate student commuting emissions for calendar year 2018. The Council requested further details regarding a permanent, annual allocation from the University Sustainability Fund including mechanisms for reporting, monitoring, and assigning allocations from the University Sustainability Fund.

## Schedule

The Office of Sustainability (OS), with oversight by the University Sustainability Council and UMD's Vice President for Administration & Finance, has established a schedule for purchasing verified carbon offsets for other UMD initiatives (Carbon Neutral Air Travel and Carbon Neutral New Development). Offset purchases for Carbon Neutral Commuting, including this program, will align with existing purchasing activities and conform to the following schedule each year beginning in 2019:

- Sep. OS estimates the quantity and cost of carbon offsets to neutralize greenhouse gas emissions associated with undergraduate student commuting for the current calendar year.
- Oct. OS presents, to the Sustainability Fund Review Committee and the SGA Sustainability Committee, the estimated number of undergraduate commuter miles, number of carbon offsets, and cost of offsets to neutralize greenhouse gas emissions from undergraduate commuting. If the estimate is below the authorized program cap, OS is authorized to proceed with transferring the estimated funds from the University Sustainability Fund to the university's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. If the estimated cost is expected to exceed the program cap, the Sustainability Fund Review Committee may recommend to the University Sustainability Council an amount to cover the 100% estimated cost of offsets; or elect to not to request additional funding for that year.
- Oct./Nov. OS presents a Carbon Offset Report to the University Sustainability Council. The report will include the type and number of verified carbon offsets purchased to neutralize emissions from the preceding year and the estimated number of carbon offsets required to negate all commuting emissions for the current calendar year. The report will break down the carbon offsets into undergraduate commuting; graduate commuting; and faculty staff commuting. The projected cost to purchase carbon offsets will also be provided. Any recommendation from the Sustainability Fund Review Committee to authorize additional funding to mitigate undergraduate commuting emissions for the current year will be presented. The University Sustainability Council may approve or disapprove additional University Sustainability Fund money to cover the anticipated budget shortfall for the current year.
- Jan. OS issues a Request for Proposals to purchase verified carbon offsets.
- Feb. Department of Transportation Services (DOTS) sends parking registration data to OS including make, model, and year of vehicle; home zip code; and faculty/staff/graduate student/undergraduate student designation for each parking registrant included in DOTS' parking registration system for the previous year.
- May OS purchases verified carbon offsets to neutralize up to 100% of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with undergraduate student commuting from the previous year based on DOTS' parking registration data and commuting miles.

Jul./Aug. OS works with offset providers to retire verified carbon offsets. Reductions in net greenhouse gas emissions will be reflected on UMD's official greenhouse gas inventory and sustainability reports.

**Program Cap**

Costs for this program will be contained with an annual cap on expenditures. The cap will be \$65,000 per year unless modified by the University Sustainability Council. OS is authorized to transfer funds from the University Sustainability Fund to the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund account to cover annual costs of this program up to the cap amount. The University Sustainability Council, with advice from the Sustainability Fund Review Committee, may elect to adjust the cap; authorize an annual expenditure above the cap; and/or terminate the program.

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