BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE

July 21, 2020

11:00 A.M.
Government Center Conference Room 11

Board of Supervisors Members Present:
Board Chair Jeffrey C. McKay
Committee Chair Daniel G. Storck, Mount Vernon District
Supervisor John Foust, Dranesville District
Supervisor Penelope A. Gross, Mason District
Supervisor Pat Herrity, Springfield District
Supervisor Rodney L. Lusk, Lee District
Supervisor Dalia A. Palchik, Providence District (Participated Virtually)
Supervisor Kathy L. Smith, Sully District
Supervisor James R. Walkinshaw, Braddock District

Others Present:
Joseph Mondoro, Chief Financial Officer

July 21, 2020 Meeting Agenda:

https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/meeting-materials/2020/july21-environmental-agenda.pdf

July 21, 2020 Meeting Materials:

https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/board-supervisors-environmental-committee-meeting-july-21-2020

The following is a summary of the highlights of the discussion from the July 21, 2020, meeting.

Today's meeting was called to order at 11:10 A.M.

Item I
Opening Remarks

The meeting began with a motion from Chairman McKay acknowledging that Supervisor Alcorn could not attend due to a medical procedure and that Supervisor Palchik would be participating remotely. Chairman McKay confirmed that a quorum of the Board was present for the meeting. Supervisor Gross seconded the motion.

After a brief introduction from Supervisor Storck, Committee Chair, the Environmental Committee accepted the minutes of June 16, 2020. With no further changes, the meeting minutes were accepted into the record.

Maya Dhavale, Senior Community Specialist, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC), gave an update on the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP). A firm timeline was set for the remainder of the CECAP process to reflect the evolving conditions under the COVID-19 pandemic. Highlights from this timeline include: Task Force meetings are scheduled for July, September, and November of this year and for January, March, April and June of 2021. Two public outreach initiatives will be occurring this August and next May. The Board will continue to be apprised of any significant meetings or updates, with the final CECAP set to be presented to the Board next July.

Additional details on the upcoming schedule were provided. The Focus Groups are meeting in advance of the July Task Force meeting to discuss the emission reduction goals of the CECAP. At the July Task Force meeting, members will be asked to vote on the CECAP goals. Following a public outreach initiative and a September Task Force meeting, the CECAP goals, as recommended by the Task Force, will be presented to the Board of Supervisors Environmental Committee for consideration. Staff and the consultants have started to evaluate strategies which will help Fairfax County meet these goals.

Item II
Job Growth through the Green Economy

The second topic on the agenda was a presentation on Job Growth through the Green Economy by Rebecca Moudry, Director, Department of Economic Initiatives (DEI).

Ms. Moudry began by explaining that the current COVID-19 pandemic has stalled and is shifting the economy. However, the pandemic has created an opportunity to investigate new growth areas, which green jobs can provide. Ms. Moudry posed the question: Do policies that reduce carbon emissions and protect and preserve the environment stimulate a green economy or green job growth? Or will investing in green sectors in turn create a healthy environment? Another question is to determine what green jobs and the green economy look like for Fairfax County. There are no universal definitions of the green economy; organizations like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the UN Environment Programme each have their own interpretations. However, it is clear that the green economy is not just about reducing carbon emissions, it is also about being socially inclusive and creating equity, which is very important to Fairfax County.

Next, Ms. Moudry posed the question: What does the transition to a green economy look like? It could mean downsizing in some sectors, but it could mean that there would be opportunities for growth across a range of other sectors. The U.S. green economy is estimated to represent $1.3 trillion in annual sales revenue and to employ nearly 9.5 million workers.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the green economy includes two categories: green outputs, or establishments that produce green goods and services, and green processes, or establishments that use environmentally friendly production processes and practices. Industries that take part in the green economy participate in a range of services or practices including production of energy from renewable sources, energy efficiency, pollution reduction, greenhouse gas reduction, recycling, natural resource conservation, and environmental compliance. Based on this information, Fairfax County has approximately 11,600 firms and 172,000 workers associated with the green economy. Examples of green businesses in Fairfax County include Hyperjet Fusion, BEM Controls, Beanstalk, Azimuth1, and HydroGeoLogic.

DEI and the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) are collaborating to lead a post-pandemic recovery framework and action plan that will highlight strategies that will support an environmentally sustainable and inclusive economy. DEI and FCEDA will further investigate those businesses that have a green economy link. Next steps for consideration are to define what green jobs look like for Fairfax County and conduct a benchmark analysis to determine if the county has a competitive advantage in a particular green sector. DEI and FCEDA will also consider what the best efforts are to support and build those sectors and grow jobs. These efforts could include building and attracting businesses, training students and workers for in-demand green jobs, and identifying partners.

Board Discussion:

Chairman Storck stated that opportunity is the operative word. The county is now looking for these opportunities. Teleworking can make a difference. The return the county will make on teleworking will be huge. He pointed out that before the pandemic, meeting with staff required trips to the Fairfax County Government Center from the Mt. Vernon Government Center. He recognized that a shift to virtual meetings will save time and costs for the county. Those investments and incentives will make a difference and the opportunities will become apparent over time.

Supervisor Gross referred to Slide 8 and pointed out that the key principles referenced in the 2017 Environmental Vision were actually key principles from the 2004 Environmental Vision statement and have been in place for almost 20 years. She then referred to Slide 6, regarding green goods and services, and noted that pollution reduction and removal, recycling, and reuse, could involve building engineers and custodians, which could change how custodians are viewed. She stated that recycling first began because of federal subsidies, but over time, as those subsidies have gone away, recycling has become more challenging. She suggested that we do a cost analysis of recycling and whether subsidies are needed again. Supervisor Gross then addressed Slide 7, concerning Beanstalk. She noted that vertical farms in repurposed office buildings have been successful in other areas and that there may be an opportunity for vertical farming in Fairfax County, particularly if some of the closed buildings that are privately owned can be repurposed. She asked if there is a zoning issue regarding repurposed buildings, if there is a market for it, and what would it take to implement vertical farming in repurposed buildings.

Chairman McKay brought up the possibility of establishing a Green Bank in Fairfax County. He sees merit in it. He stated that it may be possible to use federal dollars to support this effort. He would like to see further discussion of a Green Bank including the pros and cons of ones that exist and an analysis of how they might fit in with what can be done in the county.

Supervisor Lusk stated that he is excited about the diversification and funding opportunities to create new jobs for residents. Regarding next steps, on the equity portion, he suggested that the county consider which equity partners could further these efforts. Secondly, he noted that the Virginia Economic Development Partnership has a number of programs that are focused on working with different types of agricultural and other entities; there might be an opportunity to work with them to provide incentives and attract some of those sectors in green technologies.

Supervisor Foust commented on Victor Hoskins' presentation in the Economic Advisory Commission meeting from earlier in the day on how the county can become a place where young people want to come and have a technical career. He stated that young people are passionate about environmental issues and if the county can demonstrate that it is working on those issues, it will bring the talent. He also stated that the county needs to partner with local universities, like George Mason, to determine how these industries can be created.

Supervisor Walkinshaw also commented on the importance of attracting young people to the region. He asked if the FCEDA is actively pursuing green jobs and businesses and what constraints they may find when they talk to those businesses around the country. For a company like BEM Controls, Supervisor Walkinshaw asked if workforce, land acquisition or office space is the challenge. He also commented on the need for affordable housing options for young people starting their careers.

Chairman Storck asked about risks with the transition to the green economy and what the county's exposure to the fossil fuel economy is. He stated that, as the county transitions to green jobs and the green economy, the impacts on the economy need to be understood and mitigated.

Item III
Additional Green Initiatives

The third item on the agenda was a discussion with the Board on Additional Fairfax Green Initiatives led by Supervisor Storck, Committee Chair. He referred to the document that was distributed, which included a list of potential action items to be considered by the Board.

Supervisor Storck presented the first item for consideration (1a), which would concern the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) and the expansion of the county's compost pilot, available for county agencies and departments, to the greater community.

Supervisor Walkinshaw suggested that the item emphasize education on backyard composting, for those that have the opportunity to do so.

Supervisor Gross asked a question about composting in Arlington at the farmer's markets and if the program has issues. She was concerned that unstaffed compost collection sites may become dumping sites. Similar to the Purple Can Club, she feels that the compost collection sites would need to be staffed to avoid misuse.

Supervisor Palchik commented on her office's participation in the compost pilot program. She thinks it's a great initiative and, for the expansion to the community, would like the county to consider collection sites at libraries, community centers and schools. She suggested working with Fairfax County Public Schools and Neighborhood and Community Services on the education piece.

Supervisor Storck noted that the first item (1b) would also direct DPWES to research and report on potential initiatives to discourage potential food waste and reduce carbon usage.

Supervisor Smith suggested that this item be delayed, considering the current state of the economy.

Supervisor Storck moved to the second item, concerning the vehicle purchasing policy and the transition to electric vehicles in the county fleet.

Chairman McKay stated that he supports this effort. He asked about the rate at which the number of electric vehicles in the fleet would be increased. He noted that for the transition to be successful, the infrastructure would need to be in place and asked how much data would be available in a one-year period of time.

Joe Mondoro, Chief Financial Officer, responded that the discussion around this policy has been fast moving. The number of vehicles (four-person passenger vehicles) to be replaced in FY 2021, based on age and mileage, will actually be very small, although they may be 100% electric; FY 2022 will have a much larger number of vehicles anticipated for replacement, with as many as 90% electric vehicles, depending on the infrastructure that will be in place at the time the purchases are made. At the same time, the county is looking into the number of vehicles it needs, and how to approach the purchase of vehicles in FY 2022 – 2023, considering how the pandemic has changed operating procedures.

Dr. Kambiz Agazi, Director, OEEC, responded that the county is in the process of finalizing the Request for Procurement (RFP) for electric vehicle infrastructure for up to 20 county facilities for county vehicles or visitors. He stated that Level 1 charging stations are also being considered at county garages. An inventory of the Government Center complex found six dedicated Level I charging stations and four dedicated Level 2 chargers. To ensure that there are more Level I charging stations in county garages, such as at the Judicial Center and Merrifield Garage, a lot of work needs to be done to put in the infrastructure needed. There is potential in the garages at the Government Center complex for up to 400 charging stations. It would take dedicated equipment to put those charging stations in.

Chairman McKay noted that it will be important to align the timing of purchases with the installment of the infrastructure.

Mr. Mondoro added that funding will be available for the purchase of electric vehicles and could be offset by the fact that fewer vehicles will be purchased; additional funding may need to be identified for charging infrastructure.

Supervisor Walkinshaw asked what the cost to change the existing standard outlets in county garages would be compared to installing a dedicated charging station.

Dr. Agazi responded that a Level 1 charger would be roughly the same cost as a dedicated Level 2 charging station.

Supervisor Walkinshaw stated that the feasibility of using existing outlets for Level 1 chargers should be examined.

Dr. Agazi acknowledged that the surveys being conducted are taking that into account.

County Executive Bryan Hill added that Dominion Energy is doing a rebate program for every charging station in the coming year and it should be considered before moving forward.

Supervisor Palchik suggested that that all new facilities be considered for the installation of charging stations. She asked if the county could look at the private sector and if incentives to purchase electric vehicles could be provided to the community.

Dr. Agazi referred to a memo to the Board distributed in May 2020 that identified multiple locations in each of the districts for charging stations to be put in place. This incentivizes the community because the charging stations will be available for the community as well as county vehicles.

As there was no discussion on item three, which would direct the County Attorney to report on whether the county can provide incentives for consumer electric vehicle purchases, Chairman Storck moved onto the fourth item, which would direct the OEEC to report on implementation of a 5-cent plastic bag fee. He acknowledged that the timing on the item should be delayed and may be considered in 2021.

Dr. Agazi responded that OEEC will be coordinating the effort for the county in 2021.

Supervisor Gross commented that, with the pandemic, stores are not allowing reusable bags. The timing of this initiative is important to avoid a mixed message. Caution should be exercised in proceeding with this action.

Supervisor Walkinshaw agreed with Supervisor Gross. He added that the item may need to wait but that a plan should be made ready for the post-pandemic era.

Chairman McKay commented that the pandemic has changed many things where the cost will be passed onto residents. He agreed with Supervisor Walkinshaw that the county should be ready to move but be mindful of the short-term and long-term scenarios.

Chairman Storck moved to the fifth item, which would direct the Facilities Management Department (FMD) to report on phasing out Hydrofluorocarbon (HFC)-generating products.

Supervisor Smith asked if more information would be provided to the Board before decisions are made on the procurement of non-HFC products.

Chairman Stock confirmed that the Board will not make a decision until more is known, sometime before the FY 2022 budget.

Supervisor Foust asked if staff could give the Board an analysis or review that demonstrates the cost effectiveness of the various environmental goals in which the Board is investing. He would like to see data to guide the Board's decisions as it prioritizes these programs due to limited resources.

Chairman Storck agreed with the direction from Supervisor Foust. Supervisor Smith also agreed. Chairman Storck referred to the CECAP process, which will also be a valuable guide for how to proceed and get the best return on investments.

Supervisor Walkinshaw also agreed with Chairman Storck, adding that the findings from the Joint Environmental Task Force (JET) and the CECAP Task Force recommendations will be very valuable to establish goals, decide where to spend resources and determine the direction the Board should take.

Chairman Storck introduced the sixth item regarding several land use policy issues. Supervisor Smith would need to help manage these as head of the Land Use Policy Committee. The first part of item six (6a) would direct the Land Use Policy Committee to consider the requirement of energy use disclosures on residential home sales. The committee would first need to know if the county has the authority to require these disclosures, and if not, if that is a legislative issue that should be considered.

Chairman McKay asked if this item was referring to the construction of new homes or all residential sales.

Chairman Storck replied that it was left open-ended.

Chairman McKay added that information on how this is done in other jurisdictions, including how disclosures are certified, would be helpful. Disclosures could be discretionary. The legal question should be tackled first. If legislative action is needed, and the Board goes to the General Assembly to ask for authority, the Board first needs to know how this would work.

Chairman Stock replied that the disclosures involve the release of utility bills.

Chairman McKay responded that the habits of residents are just as important as the efficiency of their units, and sometimes a review of utility bills is inconclusive. The county should address the legal question first and tackle the other issues later.

Supervisor Smith agreed with the comments from Chairman McKay that the legal piece would be the place to start.

Chairman Storck introduced the next part of the item (6b), regarding the Comprehensive Plan policy on EV ready provisions.

Supervisor Smith commented that this issue is already being addressed through the Zoning Ordinance Modernization Project (zMOD).

Chairman Storck moved on to the next part of the item (6c), regarding the analysis of requirements and impediments for new commercial and incentives for new residential construction to implement community solar and/or geothermal systems.

As there was no discussion, Chairman Storck introduced the final part of the item (6d), on incentivizing developers and builders to adhere to residential and commercial green building practices. The item would also direct the Land Use Policy Committee to consider the creation of a green building profile, publicizing developer, builder and project scores based on the achievement of certain benchmarks.

Supervisor Walkinshaw commented that a green building profile is something with a lot of promise and could be voluntary. A scoring system could be developed that encourages customers to look at the data.

Chairman Storck introduced the seventh item, regarding the creation of a Consolidated Community Funding Pool (CCFP) pilot and potential public private partnership (PPP) to provide a competitive grants process for funding local businesses to provide workforce energy efficiency and weatherization (green jobs) training opportunities while upgrading the energy efficiency on eligible low-income and seniors homes.

Supervisor Gross expressed her concerns about the program. She said the Board should be extremely careful not to put the pilot in the CCFP program. It would have ramifications with Human Services and other community services.

Supervisor Storck responded that this item is referring to the model of the CCFP.

Chairman McKay added that there is merit to this effort being a stand-alone pilot. He suggested that the Board look at incentivizing non-profit housing providers to reduce utility bills for their clients. A listing of the opportunities that are out there now and a listing of opportunities to provide grants to these providers for energy efficiency are needed.

Chairman Storck introduced the eighth and final item, which would direct the County Executive and County Attorney to research the feasibility and legality of providing guidance to Fairfax County retirement fund managers to increase support for non-greenhouse gas emitting energy investments and decreasing those in fossil fuels.

Supervisor Lusk commented that he likes how this item relates to other investments in green energy. He suggested that the investments be tracked if there are opportunities for return on investment for the community.

Supervisor Walkinshaw commented that defining what is or isn't a fossil fuel company would be challenging. The county would need to determine the level of exposure of its retirement funds to fossil fuel industries, especially those that are unable to adapt to the 21st century economy.

Supervisor Foust commented that on the seventh and eighth action items, the Board should determine how much it can direct these monies to local businesses. Can it be required that nonprofits buy their energy efficient products from local businesses? There should be a link between the county's investment in the green economy and green products.

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 P.M.