

## **CHAPTER VI**

# **COMMUNICATIONS PLAN SUMMARY**

### **A. CHAPTER SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

The goal of developing a communications plan is to establish specific public involvement and education efforts that will assist Fairfax County in communicating stormwater needs and goals to the public and to build public support for the stormwater program and funding strategy. The public information and involvement effort supports several of the key objectives of the overall funding analysis plan. The Communications Plan (detailed Plan is Appendix IV of this report) addresses the following goals:

- To assess the resident's desired level of service for stormwater.
- To educate various stakeholders on the stormwater services provided by the County and to provide information on challenges for protection of water quality and quality of life for residents and businesses.
- To build a compelling case for establishment of a dedicated funding source to support stormwater management in Fairfax County.

#### **1. SUMMARY OF PLAN - COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS**

The Communications Plan considers the communications elements needed to address a change in stormwater services, expanding capabilities of the County for the management of drainage and protection of water quality, including a change in funding strategy. The Plan identified how specific methods and messages will relate back to the ongoing communications program in Fairfax County. The Plan targets the next 18 months in specific terms with suggestions for continuing processes to ensure an on-going strategy is maintained.

The Communications Plan specifically addresses the following issues:

- Recommendations on strategies for public involvement to gauge the level of service desired by Fairfax residents from their stormwater program.
- Effective strategies for engaging County officials regarding long-term solutions for stormwater related issues.
- Effective methods of engaging the public to maximize participation in decision-making.
- Process for development and utilization of a Resident-based advisory committee upon authorization of the implementation phase

The plan is divided into three phases, which evolve as more in-depth information is available and as the funding strategy decisions are finalized. In these phases, the kinds of information delivered become more specific, the audiences more broadly defined, and the media more widespread into the general community. Full details of the plan by phase starts on page 8 of this document.





## 2. ACTION ITEMS SUMMARY

There are several key communications needs that should be addressed within the activities and information tools that need to be developed within the next 60 days and targeted for the next eighteen (18) months. These communications needs fall into three categories – 1) written materials to be used throughout the program; 2) briefing key groups to start building support for the ideas; and 3) creation of a stormwater Advisory Committee to begin a dialogue with residents regarding the stormwater program needs and recommended levels of service. In addition, the County should maintain on-going outreach efforts within the watershed study process as well as other more routine activities, incorporating information from this study to reflect the project focus, status and potential outcomes.

Summary of Activities		
Activity/Audience	Now to 9-2004	9-2004 to 12-2005
<b>Written Materials</b>  Audience: Staff Board of Supervisors Key stakeholders Media General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop FAQs for use with staff, Board of Supervisors, County Leadership, general public and the Citizen Advisory Committee, targeting specific subject matter regarding key issues; roles; priorities; study outcomes and recommendations.</li> <li>- Provide customer service staff and appropriate field inspectors with names/contact information to refer questions to the correct person.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Update Web site to include FAQs and other briefing materials developed during the work of the Citizen Advisory Committee.</li> <li>- Prepare media briefing materials for use when critical decisions will be made.</li> <li>- Prepare monthly summaries of activities/progress for use by County Leadership and staff who are interacting with the public.</li> <li>- Develop printed materials that can be distributed to general public, placed in key County buildings and used in presentations, based on final decisions of County Board regarding changes in program and funding.</li> </ul>
<b>Briefings</b>  Audience: Board of Supervisors County Leadership Staff General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide briefings on the status of the project, including a report to the Board of Supervisors, including the process, milestones, rationale of recommendations, implementation process.</li> <li>- Update County leadership, key Board members, staff, and the Board's Environmental Committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain update for County Leadership, briefings of Board prior to key decision points, key staff leadership using written tools developed through the process.</li> <li>- Create an outreach program to take the message to the public through presentations to civic groups, community groups, watershed study teams, and other identified stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Citizen Advisory Committee</b>  Audience: Committee Board of Supervisors County Leadership Media General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create structure for the committee and present in briefings of the County Leadership and Board of Supervisors.</li> <li>- 15-20 people to serve; identify specific recommendations on who should serve.</li> <li>- Identify mission for Committee</li> <li>- Develop schedule of meetings</li> <li>- Define process for committee operation.</li> <li>- Identify policy issues for their consideration.</li> <li>- Set date of first meeting.</li> <li>- Identify County staff support to the Committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prepare briefing materials and potentially meet with each member prior to first formal committee meeting.</li> <li>- Provide Board with names and/or organizations recommended for appointment.</li> <li>- Prepare FAQ for Committee regarding role, mission, schedule, process and results of initial study.</li> <li>- Prepare meeting minutes and policy discussion papers and provide one week prior to each meeting to ensure effective discussions.</li> </ul>



## **B. OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN**

The goal of developing a communications plan is to establish specific public involvement and education efforts that will assist Fairfax County in communicating stormwater needs and goals to the public and to build public support for the stormwater program and funding strategy.

The Communications Plan is designed to work in concert with the overall Watershed Community Needs Assessment and Funding Options study. In some cases, the public effort leads development of the overall program by feeding relevant information to it (i.e. surveys and interviews); in some cases it validates the program by checking resident expectations (i.e., the Stormwater Advisory Committee), and in some cases it follows with public information and education that supports or explains the findings (i.e., bill stuffers and newspaper articles regarding the program).

A significant element of a public information strategy is to involve in a meaningful way specific stakeholder groups whose support is important to the success of the stormwater program and financing strategy. This Communications Plan is designed to incorporate internal and external communications strategies, to raise awareness of the issue of stormwater program needs and then to introduce the various audiences to the need for stable, adequate funding for stormwater programs in Fairfax County. Once awareness is raised, the communications strategy is to present a rationale and a convincing justification for the funding targets and level of service for the stormwater program. The strategy will define the compelling case for change.

The Communications Plan targets specific messages to specific audiences and is designed to take advantage of current, already-effective communications methods utilized in Fairfax County, as well as develop new communications tools/strategies to address gaps in current knowledge and interest regarding stormwater. Research takes place early to determine public knowledge of stormwater management services and their ranking of the importance of the service. The specifics of level of service for stormwater comes from this research, as well as from secondary research from earlier studies of the County, and are melded with strategic plan goals, overall program goals, VPDES Phase I and other regulatory requirements for public education and involvement, and builds the final plan to meet those requirements and desires. The plan also considers the spirit and intent of the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan and the Board of Supervisors' Environmental Agenda and ties these efforts into the overall County vision.

This Communications Plan will be carried out in collaboration with the Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs. The Office of Public Affairs has great expertise in the Fairfax County audiences, media, and culture and it is anticipated will provide on-going advice and leadership into the implementation of the Communications Plan. In addition, OPA communicates regularly to and with the County Board of Supervisors and serves as a public information consultant to DPWES. They coordinate County outreach efforts utilizing a variety of media, including print, audio, visual, and Internet-based resources. In addition, where it is possible, the Office of Public Affairs can service Fairfax County's needs for printing, publication and support of the Communications Plan, as well as serving as the spokespersons for the program.



While developing the stormwater management program to meet level of service needs in Fairfax, the current public information efforts the County uses should continue. This is important for several reasons: 1) the public needs to know and understand their roles and responsibilities in terms of stormwater, and 2) the County has an obligation to provide public information, education, involvement and participation opportunities as part of the VPDES Phase I permit and other efforts. For example, residents participating in the “Explore Your Watershed Walks” sponsored by the Audubon Naturalist Society, Fairfax County Stream Protection Strategy and Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District learn about organisms living in Fairfax County streams and could also be taught about how many streams in Fairfax County need restoration and how that is accomplished, along with how much it costs the County on an average year to keep up with the needs. In addition, there may be excellent opportunities with the current partners (the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, the Potomac River Greenways Coalition, watershed groups, etc.) to present public information regarding a specific communications campaign as it evolves. It may be appropriate to conduct a forum with all these groups to determine how they could become greater advocates for the County’s program due to their inherent interest in stormwater management issues.

This plan is built on an assumption of favorable action by the Board of Supervisors to move forward with enhanced stormwater services within the County, including a change in funding strategy that may involve the implementation of a countywide fee for service. The Communications Plan will follow the overall plan and date and/or strategies may change based on the program chosen by the Board of Supervisors.

## 1. PLAN STRUCTURE

The communications strategy for this project is based on continuing the basic ongoing communications program discussed above for stormwater management activities and developing a series of strategies that cover the various phases of public understanding of stormwater services, each one building on the last, growing and deepening public knowledge and, eventually, support for funding a strong stormwater management program.

In order to develop a plan for the public information and education program, we must first identify: (1) **the phases of the program**, (2) the relevant **target audience**, (3) **the message(s)**, and (4) **the media**, i.e. different ways available to the County to communicate its messages to the public. These elements are described in general terms in this section of the report. Specific information about how the communication plan uses these four elements is contained in Section 3 of this report, where the plan is divided by phase.

The development of a public understanding of the stormwater program funded by a user-fee has three phases: Community Outreach for Program Development, Program Adoption and Implementation (Year One), and the On-going Outreach and Communication period.





Phase	Community Outreach for Program Development	Program Adoption and Implementation for Year One	On-going Outreach and Communications
	<b>JULY 2004-APRIL 2005</b>	<b>APRIL 2005 through FY 2006</b>	<b>FY 2007-ON</b>
<b>Timing</b>	The process for gaining public input on needs, issues, level of service and funding options starts immediately and is completed at the time of action taken by the Board of Supervisors.	Developed during the finalization of the program recommendations and implemented during the initial changes in the program strategy and funding methodology.	Begins during implementation of changes in program and funding and continues through the life of the stormwater program.
<b>Focus</b>	Gathering and disseminating data and information, identifying and meeting with certain key stakeholders, educating the media, and developing new stormwater management program policy. Supporting Citizen Advisory Committee process, continued updates of County Leadership and staff.	Broad coverage of the needs and responsibilities of the stormwater program and reasons for the change in funding and program, examples of the effectiveness of the stormwater program and customer service responses to those with inquiries and complaints. Requires a strong customer service capability to address specific questions and general input.	Blends into the long-term public education program concerning stormwater, water quality, drainage management, customer service and regulatory compliance.

**2. IDENTIFICATION OF TARGETED AUDIENCES**

Target audiences are selected to bring in significant segments of the community at the appropriate time. There are consistent messages for the entire County (see item 3 below, “The Messages”). In addition, certain audiences that require special attention at varying times and varying depth during the process.

It is important to craft a public information strategy that targets specific stakeholder groups whose support is important to the success of the program and financing strategy. The target audiences are both internal and external and form the initial critical mass to gain acceptance of the program. These audiences may also potentially provide the main advocates for the program once the final recommendations are complete and ready to be implemented. The stakeholder groups described below are primary audiences throughout the communications process.

Targeted Audiences	Summary of Approach
<b>Board of Supervisors</b>	Ongoing communication with the Board of Supervisors is a critical component of the approval process for the comprehensive stormwater program. Development of proposed changes in program and funding strategy include several specific milestones at which the elected leadership will be directly engaged. Use of monthly written project summaries is one effective tool in sustaining interest and understanding by the Board of Supervisors over the next year. Briefing County Leadership on a 60-day basis will also support communication with the Board.
<b>Citizen Advisory Committee –</b>	Fairfax County has an established pattern of using citizen’s committees to gauge public reaction and review proposed County actions that affect citizens’ lives. The Committee plays a pivotal role in providing valuable community input on level of service and community expectations and provides a method of documenting the discussions and draft policies with residents. The Committee should be appointed by the Board with recommendations on structure from the staff. A 15 to 20 member Committee will provide sufficiently broad representation to ensure inclusiveness.





<p><b>The Media -</b></p>	<p>The news media can be a great ally to the County. When the media are educated and informed early, they are generally supportive of stormwater agencies and the utilization of user fees based on equity and program needs. With Fairfax County's wide geographic area, it is especially important to find ways to develop relationships with media in all parts of the County, especially those who are favorable to publicizing environmental stories. The County will also have to cultivate media outlets (most likely radio) that cover some of the diverse groups where English is a second language, such as the Hispanic and Asian media outlets.</p>
<p><b>Fairfax County Employees –</b></p>	<p>There are several levels of employees who should be contacted and trained throughout the course of this program. The attention paid to the employees is dependent on their role and their influence on the program. For example, senior employees and supervisors in other departments may be asked questions about the funding analysis and need to know some general information with which they can respond. STW employees need to support to the process and front-line employees, like the maintenance crews, need to be able to successfully answer questions of the public as they make their rounds. The program targets each level of internal audience to develop specific messages for internal newsletters, meetings, and training that match their levels of need.</p>
<p><b>Public Information Officers Within the County, Cities, and Towns within Fairfax County Limits –</b></p>	<p>It would be useful to build a relationship among the Public Information Officers (PIOs) of area jurisdictions, targeting them as an outlet for accurate information for their elected officials, leadership and general public. This will help limit distribution of misinformation and enable them to respond as necessary to their publics.</p>
<p><b>The General Public–</b></p>	<p>There are a number of ways to effectively engage the general public in issues that they can help control, particularly through the County's on-going program for public education and involvement. As part of this more focused and specialized outreach, however, the initial general public education should be limited to why stormwater management is important and why it should concern them. During this process, a gauge of the public's perception about stormwater issues in Fairfax County is useful and can be obtained through surveys or focus groups, gaining a greater understanding of the expectations of the public and their support for an expanded program of services to address water quality and water quantity challenges. The Citizen Advisory Committee is one way to develop the appropriate messages to the general public, using their focused input into crafting messages on program needs, policy and change.</p>

**3. OVERVIEW OF THE THEMES – IT'S ALL ABOUT CHANGE**

What is driving changes in the overall management of stormwater, both water quality protection and runoff controls? Answering this question is the foundation of the message that supports the changes needed, including a change in the funding strategy to ensure that expectations are met.

The message must first address why change is needed. It is the change in program or levels of services that creates the basis of understanding. Stress the goals of the expanded stormwater program and demonstrate those improvements in service are critically needed by focusing in on the expectations of the County residents. Care should be taken to focus on the environmental benefits that directly affect the County residents instead of on federal policy that is mandating the changes. It is also important to create a reasonable level of expectation about what the stormwater program can accomplish.



It is the program that must be presented and the drivers for change must make sense to the public. In summary the messages for all the public education activities should be clear and direct and should include the following themes, which highlight the program and build upon each other:

- There are drainage, water quality and other stormwater runoff needs in the County that are currently not being met and may cause flooding, stream degradation, and erosion if they are not addressed (with specific examples that are readily identifiable).
- We have a plan (program) to meet these needs that is well thought out, effective and not extravagant.
- Government must take the lead in managing stormwater for the County's benefit.
- The changes and resulting stormwater program costs more money in the short-term, but this additional investment is well worth it due to the problems that will be solved and additional expenses avoided.
- The method to generate additional revenue is fair, adequate, equitable and stable.
- There are highly visible projects as a demonstration that the program is a reality.

#### **4. METHODS/TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION**

Once the County has decided on the timing of its message, the target audience for the message, and the content of the message, we can focus on the tools for conveying the message effectively. The first opportunities will come within the first 60 days as the Stormwater Advisory Committee is formed and a decision regarding appropriate information to be shared is accumulated. Later the meetings of the Stormwater Advisory Committee and the decisions by the Board of Supervisors will provide direction. As the Buildup Phase reaches an end, potential rates are determined, the Stormwater Policy Committee provides its recommendations and the presentations to the Board of Supervisors all provide opportunities for more detailed media coverage. The following types of communication tools or methodologies are recommended for Fairfax County and are discussed in detail in Section C below.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently Asked Questions Memos</li> <li>• Customer Service Staff updates</li> <li>• Presentations to Civic Organizations</li> <li>• Update of Web site</li> <li>• County TV Channel</li> <li>• NewsLink</li> <li>• Courier</li> <li>• Articles in Board of Supervisors newsletter</li> <li>• Create micro-site for project</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly Summaries of Project Progress</li> <li>• Briefings of Board, County Leadership, staff</li> <li>• Policy Paper Process for Citizen Committee</li> <li>• News to Use</li> <li>• Radio spots</li> <li>• Weekly Agenda</li> <li>• Mailings to HOAs</li> <li>• Materials in libraries and other County facilities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multilingual publications</li> <li>• Community meetings</li> <li>• Brochure for use in presentations</li> <li>• Speakers Bureau</li> <li>• Media Summaries</li> <li>• News Releases</li> <li>• Letters to Industry</li> <li>• Special events, such as Fall for Fairfax</li> </ul> |
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