Chapter 15 Public Participation

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Public Participation in Development of the SWMP and Future Public Outreach and Education Strategies

This chapter discusses the public participation in the development and review of this Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP), including both citizen and private sector involvement, public meetings, the consideration of public/private partnerships, and the public outreach and education strategies to execute the future vision of the solid waste management (SWM) system.

Developing the Draft Plan (September 2002 to January 2004)

Community Involvement

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Following the initial planning by county staff, the county hired a consultant to assist with the strategic planning and public outreach portions of the plan. The technical specifications for the consultant required experience with public outreach and citizen participation as a significant part of the qualifications of the company. The evaluation criteria were also weighted highly towards experience in public outreach and public education.

The Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs (OPA) formulated strategies for the media, prepared news releases, disseminated printed materials

about the plan, and offered announcements on the county's cable channel 16. Close coordination of information about the developing plan allowed OPA staff to infuse the information into many publications originating from their office, including letters to homeowners associations (HOAs), news releases, cable news announcements, News to Use, Newslink, and others.

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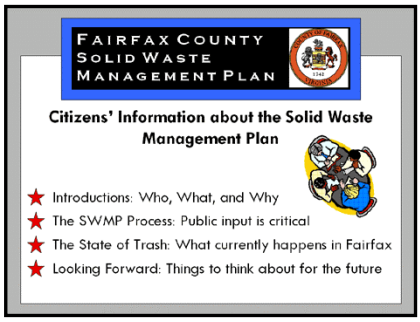
The county's public outreach strategy was to involve citizens early and often in the development of the plan. Public outreach targeted all citizens of Fairfax County, through a variety of media. Outreach messages, which were consistent across all media, helped citizens understand the need for the plan and how to get involved in its development. The county also provided a single telephone number, email address and contact for easy channeling of questions and comments from citizens.

SWMP Overview Presentation



County staff prepared a short Powerpoint® presentation addressing the requirements for developing a SWMP, discussing how the county currently manages solid waste, and exploring important SWM issues during the planning period. The presentation focused on asking citizens to participate in the development of the plan and explaining how to become involved. The presentation was placed on the county's website, in both English and Spanish.

The presentation was used to generate discussion at most of the community meetings. Favorable comments were received from citizens about the clarity and focus of the presentation in stimulating public discussion.

Brochure

The county also constructed an initial brochure explaining the SWMP requirements and requesting citizens' input. The brochure's text provided the central information used on the county's website. Over 1,000 copies of the brochure were distributed at community meetings, events, and at Board of Supervisors' offices. A copy of the brochure is included in Appendix G.

Web Page

Fairfax County created and placed a SWMP web page (located at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/swmp) on the county's website. The site provided an overview of the SWMP requirements, current waste handling

primer, a calendar of planned community meetings/events, how citizens can become involved in development of the plan, and links to the SWMP public opinion survey and overview presentation. The county also used the page to provide citizens updates on the planning process. The web page was presented in English and Spanish.

Public Opinion Survey

Fairfax County used the public opinion survey to understand citizens' SWM concerns and to gauge support of potential SWMP actions.

Integral to the county's public outreach program was a public opinion survey. County staff used the survey to understand citizens' SWM concerns and to gauge support of potential SWMP actions.

The county survey was developed during an environmental workshop in April 2003. Participants provided their SWM ideas and issues and reviewed a preliminary list of survey questions. Based upon these comments, the county completed a draft survey. This draft was reviewed by county staff familiar with conducting surveys, the SWMP consultant, and several citizens' groups including the Citizens' Advisory Committee, the Lorton Citizens Alliance Team, attendees at the Earth/Arbor Day celebration, the Business Advisory Committee, and at other smaller community meetings in April-May 2003.

The survey was finalized for the Celebrate Fairfax county fair in early June and placed on the county's website for online submission. The county translated the survey into Spanish and Korean in an effort to broaden the input from residents who may not speak English as a primary language.

County staff also provided the survey to attendees at various community meetings and public events such as Centreville Days, Mason District Festival, Lee District Open House, Mount Vernon Council of Civic Associations, North Springfield Association, Fall for Fairfax, Braddock District Council, and several homeowners' association meetings.

The survey was available from June through October 31, 2003. During this time, the county received over 1,400 completed surveys. Staff evaluated the responses to the questions as part of the development of this SWMP.

Community Meetings Prior to the Draft SWMP

Throughout the development of this SWMP, county staff met with and listened to county residents concerning the plan. Staff conducted over 80 meetings to collect information for preparing the draft plan. During those

meetings and events, staff directly engaged over 6,500 residents in providing input to the plan.

Other Outreach Efforts

Other county outreach efforts included:

- Mailed a letter to over 1,800 homeowners' associations requesting that they include information about the online public opinion survey in their newsletters and other publications

- Five Newslink announcements, a daily internal news email that county employees receive. Since a large percentage of county employees are county residents, Newslink generated several responses to the public opinion survey

- Announced the online public opinion survey on Channel 16 during September-October, 2003, and

- Announced the development of the SWMP in monthly *Hauler News* newsletters sent to collection companies in the county, asking for their input to the SWMP and participation in the Public Opinion Survey, and notifying them when the draft SWMP was available on the Fairfax County website.

County Government Meetings

County staff met several times with individual members of the Board of Supervisors throughout the planning and preparation of the SWMP to obtain guidance. Formal briefings were conducted with the Board through the Environmental Subcommittee beginning in August 2002 and culminating in a presentation on January 26, 2004. Their assistance was invaluable in identifying over 50 key individuals and groups within the county who should be contacted about the plan. The county also arranged meetings with most of the District Councils that represent many homeowners associations and community groups.

Stakeholder Meetings

The county conducted a series of meetings, correspondence and interviews with the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Solid Waste, the Sierra Club, environmental subcommittee of the Reston Association, Consumer Protection Commission, Environmental Quality Advisory Council, and other groups. Their input was incorporated into development of the SWMP.

Private Sector Involvement

Input from Fairfax County businesses was also fundamental to producing this SWMP.

Input from Fairfax County businesses and was also fundamental to producing this SWMP. The county conducted a series of meetings, correspondence and interviews with the Business Advisory Committee on Solid Waste and other groups. During these interviews and meetings, the county obtained information about issues these key business leaders anticipated during the planning period, as well as possible impacts of potential SWMP actions.

Rolling Out the Draft Plan (January 2004 to June 2004)

Once the draft SWMP was prepared, the county and its contractor developed a multimedia presentation. The presentation explained the requirements for the SWMP, summarized the process of developing the plan to date, discussed future waste generation projections, described the SWMP recommendations to bridge the gap between the current and future SWM system, and requested community review of the plan. The 16 minute presentation was placed on the website together with the Draft SWMP as well as included on CDs mailed to interested residents. This presentation formed the core of the public meetings scheduled to roll the plan out to the community.

Public Meetings

The county conducted five public meetings to allow citizens to review and comment on the draft SWMP.

The county scheduled five public meetings in various locations throughout the county to allow citizens to review and comment on the draft SWMP. Meetings were held at:

Date	Time	Location
Feb 26	7:00 pm	Mt Vernon Government Center 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria
March 9	2:00 pm	Fairfax County Government Center 12000 Government Center Parkway, Room 9/10, Fairfax
March 9	7:00 pm	Fairfax County Government Center 12000 Government Center Parkway, Room 4/5, Fairfax
March 18	7:00 pm	Reston Community Center 2310 Colts Neck Road, Reston
March 20	10:00 am	Mason Government Center 6507 Columbia Pike, Annandale

Issues discussed at the meetings included:

- increasing waste generation rates
- improving residential collection efficiency and effectiveness
- increasing curbside and business recycling requirements
- enhancing public information and outreach

- continuing use of the waste-to-energy facility after 2011
- handling CDD more effectively

The county summarized the comments and questions from attendees and the responses provided by county staff at the five public meetings in a separate document.

Web Page

The county updated the existing SWMP web page on the DPWES website to add the Draft SWMP, the multimedia presentation and an updated schedule of events.

The Draft Plan included 15 chapters and several appendices describing the process used to project the future waste management needs, determine how to meet those requirements through strategic program recommendations, and capture community involvement in the entire process. Presented in PDF format, providing the Draft Plan on the website allowed residents to download and print copies for review. Three drafts were updated and uploaded during the three months of review prior to the public hearing on May 10. Appendices contained much of the process information and data supporting the recommendations contained in the plan.

A few paper copies of the Plan were printed, but mostly the review has been accomplished electronically, thus saving many trees and paper from being recycled.

Additional Community Meetings

During the review period, County staff met with over 20 community groups to solicit input to the Draft Plan. These meetings included Supervisor Smyth's Environmental Workshop (March 20, 2004), the Citizens Advisory Committee on Solid Waste (April 6, 2004), Earth Day/Arbor Day (April 24, 2004), Lorton Citizens Alliance Team (multiple meetings), Environmental Quality Advisory Council (March 10, 2004), Solid Waste Business Advisory Committee (multiple meetings), Small Business Commission (March 29, 2004), Mount Vernon Town Meeting (March 31, 2004), Hayfield General Citizens Meeting (February 18, 2004), and Consumer Affairs Council.

Other Outreach Efforts

Other public outreach efforts included:

- Several news releases were published by the Office of Public Affairs announcing the Draft SWMP and soliciting comments through the SWMP email address.

- Six Newslink announcements were distributed informing county employees of the opportunity to review the SWMP. Several county employees attended the public meeting at the Government Center on March 9 at 2:00 p.m.

- Paper copies of the Draft Plan were placed in all 22 public libraries throughout the county for easy access by residents.

- Numerous emails, phone calls, and written comments were received by county staff during the SWMP review period. These were addressed with the originator to clarify issues and answer questions. All comments were considered in the final version of the Draft SWMP.

- Letters were mailed to residential collection companies notifying them of the proposed changes to residential collection services. The companies were also invited to attend the Public Hearing on the Plan.

- Briefing of the Technical Committee of the Old Dominion Chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America on February 27, 2004 to discuss implications of the SWMP recommendations on Fairfax County and surrounding jurisdictions.

- Meeting with representatives of Arlington County and Alexandria to coordinate information about the respective SWMPs on March 5, 2004. Several of the recommendations in the SWMP have regional impact.

- Emails or letters were sent to every person who attended a public meeting announcing the Public Hearing time and date.

- Emails were sent to 34 community contacts from the earlier phase of development of the plan indicating that the Draft SWMP was available on the website for review and comment.

Brochure

A tri-fold,14” by 17” color brochure was prepared highlighting the SWMP recommendations and was distributed at all meetings and with mailings. This handy, simple brochure was very useful in summarizing the complex issues and recommendations so that residents did not have to read the entire Draft Plan to participate in discussion of its ideas. The brochure

also encouraged residents to provide comments by either email or telephone to county staff.

The content of the brochure formed the basis for large posters that were used as visual aids to illustrate recommendations at the public meetings. A copy of the brochure is included in Appendix G.

Four meetings were held with residential waste collection companies to explain the issues identified during the preparation of the SWMP and the collection recommendations. The collection companies provided extensive information, comments, and concerns about the recommendation. The dialog was invaluable in laying the foundation for future meetings and working sessions to resolve the customer service issues identified and improve residential collection service countywide.

The county placed paid advertisements in local newspapers to promote the community public meetings throughout the county. Altogether, 20 ads ran in local papers.

The Chronicle newspapers attended two public meetings and published favorable stories about the SWMP's comprehensive public involvement process and recommendations.

News releases ran four times in local newspapers, three Magisterial District newsletters, News-to-Use monthly announcements, and the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District newsletter.

Several articles appeared in local newspapers including the Washington Post, Connection newspapers, and others commenting on the Public Hearing and recommendations in the SWMP.

Meetings with Board members addressing the SWMP included:

- County staff briefed the Board's Environmental Subcommittee on January 30, 2004 on the Draft SWMP recommendations.

- The County Executive sent copies of the Draft SWMP to Board members on March 18, along with a CD containing the plan and the multimedia presentation. The Board authorized the advertisement of a Public Hearing on the SWMP (to be held May 10) at the March 29, 2004 meeting.

- The final contact with the Board concerning the SWMP was the Public Hearing on May 10, 2004.

Several of the Board members have also discussed the SWMP during other conversations and meetings with county staff.

On March 29, 2003, the Board of Supervisors authorized a public hearing to be held on May 10, 2003. The public hearing was advertised in accordance with State law.

Fairfax County also purchased advertisements notifying residents of the forthcoming public hearing. Letters were sent to residents who had attended previous public meetings or expressed interest in the SWMP and the waste collection companies. Information about the public hearing was placed on the county's website.

Considerable media was generated by the residential collection companies to voice their opposition to one provision in the SWMP proposing that the county increase its oversight of residential collection service.

On May 10, 2004 at the Public Hearing for the Solid Waste Management Plan, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors requested county staff to modify portions of the draft Plan to reflect:

- deletion of all references to the implementation of the five-year notice regarding displacement of private companies engaged in the provision of pickup and disposal of garbage, trash or refuse;

- establishment of a Board appointed Task Force comprised of representatives of small and large collection companies, consumer representatives, representatives of the environmental and business communities, and staff to work together to resolve issues related to service quality, competition, air emissions from trucks, safety, disaster and emergency response, unified recycling activities, and other issues that may be specified by the Board of Supervisors; and,

- preparation and delivery of a report to the Board by May 10, 2005, regarding the outcomes of the efforts of the Task Force.

The Board of Supervisors further moved that staff submit Fairfax County's Solid Waste Management Plan, as modified pursuant to the Board's action (described above) to the Virginia Department of Environmental

Quality by June 30, 2004. The Clerk's Board Summary from the Public Hearing and resolution adopting the plan is included in Appendix H.

The Task Force was appointed by the Board of Supervisors on May 24, 2004. Their initial meeting was on June 8, 2004 and their work will continue as directed by the Board of Supervisors.

Fairfax County plans to encourage high quality and efficient private sector operations over the SWMP planning period. County staff will encourage and support private sector initiatives such as the development of CDD recycling as well as source reduction, reuse, and recycling initiatives, as resources allow.

County staff will continue to look for partnerships with other jurisdictions that will allow for the efficient and effective transfer or disposal of waste. Existing waste exchanges with Prince William County will likely continue and the potential exists for expanding not only the amounts of exchange but also the materials included in the agreement. Taking a regional approach to CDD could also result to additional inter-jurisdictional agreements.

Fairfax County plans to increase its use of public outreach and education to promote its SWMP actions throughout the planning period. Staff will increase promotion of source reduction and reuse programs to help reduce the amount of waste that needs to be disposed. Staff will also enhance its efforts to inform the public about new programs or changes to collection, recycling or disposal programs.

Public outreach and education will be executed through a variety of media. The county will use its website to post timely information. The county will also use advertisements and cable TV notices to inform residents of changes in policy or provide "how-to" for recycling and disposal of their waste.

Education efforts will continue through the Fairfax County Public Schools in partnership with Clean Fairfax Council. Materials will be developed to help students learn about the need for source reduction and reuse, recycling and safe disposal of materials. Through educational and fun programs at county-sponsored events, children will learn how to best manage solid waste to protect the environment.

In response to the public opinion survey where citizens rated periodic mailings to their as the number one way they would like to receive information from the county, staff will endeavor to use direct mailings, when funding or other avenues are available to support the mail costs.

The SWMP is a strategic plan providing the direction for solid waste management into the future. Implementation plans will need to be prepared with the attendant studies and analyses to ensure that recommended changes improve effectiveness, efficiency or environmental responsibility. To that end, residents and community groups will be consulted and involved during the preparation of these implementation plans. Only through engaging the community appropriately can County staff ensure that the services offered to residents meet community needs and desires for the future.