



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 16, 2025

TO: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Larry J. Zaragoza, DEnv, Chair *Larry J. Zaragoza*
Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC)

SUBJECT: FY2026 Budget Recommendations

This memorandum provides EQAC's recommendations on the County's proposed FY2026 budget. EQAC recognizes that the FY26 Budget is an unusually tight year, and we greatly appreciate the efforts that have been made to preserve environmental programs, especially in the Office of Energy and Environmental Coordination (OEEC) and the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES). We have categorized our requests into three groups: 1. Requests to Fund if Possible, 2. Preserve support for the Wildlife Management Program (not a funding request) and 3) Requests for the 2027 Fiscal Year.

1. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FUNDING IF FEASIBLE

A. Restore the vacant Management Analyst IV position to OEEC.

This is a management position that is important to planning and prioritizing the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) and Resilient Fairfax work.

B. EQAC is concerned that the proposed budget cuts to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) will result in unacceptable impacts to Fairfax County. The proposed budget cuts identified below have the potential to reduce park services to unacceptable levels.

- 50% reduction in trail maintenance: The proposed budget includes a 50% reduction of \$250K. Trail maintenance is important, and a 50% reduction cannot be sustainable unless there is an alternative cost-free way to maintain the trails.
- Elimination of the Non-Merit Position Supporting the Invasive Management Program: Parks are being overtaken by invasives, and we recommend support for the Invasive Management Program when there are volunteers willing to clear out invasives. (\$64K).
- Removal of Hazardous Trees: Reducing the \$890K budget for forestry operation by \$250K is concerning. At a minimum, this program should be monitored to be sure that the FCPA can address trees that property owners report as hazardous (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/trees/who-to-call>).
- Reducing Port-a-Jon cleaning: Reducing the cleaning/stocking schedule could create problems depending on the usage of the facilities. This must be closely monitored. The impact on residents if toilets are not cleaned is obvious and immediate.

EQAC also recognizes that trash collection, especially over the weekends, is an issue for at least some parks.

The FCPA has been nationally recognized for its extensive network of parks, trails and recreation facilities. If the County is to retain this reputation, the County should watch funding levels to ensure that these programs are not reduced to unacceptable levels. EQAC appreciates the support that the Board has provided to the FCPA.

2. PRESERVE THE SUPPORT FOR THE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The budget description provides no mention of wildlife management support. The budget description describes the transfer as moving 34 full-time employees (FTE) and \$4,204,072 from the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) to the Department of Animal Services (DAS), which is over a 70% increase in the expenditures for DAS. Support of the police officers was critical to the success of the widely respected Wildlife Management Program, which Dr. Katherine Edwards leads. We ask that the support for Dr. Edwards be preserved so that the Wildlife Management Program is not negatively impacted.

EQAC has been a supporter of the Wildlife Management Program for decades. We hope that the County will preserve the support that the sworn Police Officers had historically provided for Wildlife Management as designated positions are transitioned from the FCPD to DAS. This support included a variety of activities such as calls related to wild animals to supporting managed hunts.

EQAC thanks the Board for retaining the Wildlife Biologist and her staff within the FCPD which has been a good home for the Wildlife Management Program.

3. REQUESTS FOR THE 2027 FISCAL YEAR

A. Increase the Stormwater Rate

EQAC recommends a quarter penny increase in the stormwater rate, which would increase the rate to 0.035 per \$100 of assessed value. The advertised stormwater rate will not meet needs, which include maintaining the existing stormwater infrastructure, flood control, stream restoration and possibly work on the Lake Accotink Dredging Program. The stormwater rate should be sufficient to meet needs.

B. Increase DPWES Fees to Fully Fund Programs

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- **Solid Waste Collection:** The advertised rate increases for solid waste collection and leaf collection do not provide sufficient revenue to meet the expected needs. Additionally, implementation of county-wide zero-waste activities will require a new funding source. In order to fully fund the cost of the program and continue to make progress towards the CECAP diversion goals for solid waste, EQAC recommends that the Board of Supervisors include a new zero-waste fee in FY27, support new position requests by DPWES to implement countywide zero-waste programs, and that rates for solid waste collection be set to fully recover the cost of providing that service.
- **Fairfax County Leaf Pile Collection:** To fully fund the cost of this optional county program, which serves a small percentage of county residences, EQAC recommends an annual leaf collection fee of \$0.024 per \$100 of assessed value to fully fund this program. Moreover, given the high carbon footprint associated with the leaf collection program, and that most county residents do not have curbside leaf pile collection, EQAC supports encouraging residents to compost leaves.

Adjusting the fees for these programs is desirable because shortfalls in existing fees must be covered by general funds paid by all. Implementing this recommendation would impact a small proportion of the County's residents.

We thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and welcome any questions.

cc: Jennifer Miller, Deputy County Executive
Tom Arnold, Deputy County Executive
John Morrill, Director, OEEC
Christopher Herrington, Director, DPWES
Jai Cole, Executive Director, FCPA
Philip Hagen, Director, Department of Management and Budget
Kiel Stone, FCPAB Chair
Reasa Currier, Director, DAS
Bob Blakley, Assistant Chief of Police - Operations, FCPD
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