



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 10, 2025

TO: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

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

SUBJECT: Recommendations for the Staff Proposed Ordinance on Large-Scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

The EQAC has reviewed the June 10 Preliminary Text for the draft zoning ordinance. While EQAC has some recommendations to improve the draft, EQAC commends the staff for their work to develop this draft.

Given the directive in the Virginia Clean Economy Act for Dominion to acquire 2,700 MW of energy storage capacity by 2035 and the value of more efficiently managing energy loads, the county will be faced with BESS siting decisions and so establishing an ordinance to address large scale BESS should be a priority.

As EQAC discussed with county staff, we recommend that screening not be limited to a height of up to 8 feet. Eight feet will not be adequate screening for instances where the BESS is located at a higher elevation than residential housing. We ask that this provision be revisited and that screening for single family and multifamily residential be reviewed and that screening employ a combination of solid walls and trees to minimize visual and noise impacts.

Also, as discussed in our EQAC meeting, additional information on how the county will ensure a smooth decommissioning process. Providing funds to ensure that decommissioning will be complete is appropriate and important to protect the county from liability should a BESS facility be abandoned. EQAC also recommends that transitional screening be Type 3 for ALL residential classifications (both single-family dwelling and all other residential uses) rather than allowing less transitional screening [Type 2] for residential uses that are not single-family dwellings.

EQAC commends staff for their efforts to provide for a zoning ordinance that addresses many areas that are important to county residents. Some features that we believe should be highlighted include:

1. Providing for the colocation of electrical substations and BESS when appropriate.
2. Reviewing the state model ordinance and ordinances of other Virginia counties and recommending larger setbacks to protect residents from impacts.

3. Recommending a noise study report for large container BESS units.
4. Explicitly providing reasonable steps to protect health and the environment from potential lithium-ion battery fire hazards.

In conclusion, EQAC believes that this draft is a good start that is needed. We hope that these comments will be helpful and welcome the opportunity to address any questions.

cc: Jennifer L. Miller, Deputy County Executive
John Morrill, Director, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC)
Tracy D Strunk, Director, Department of Planning and Development (DPD)
Carmen Bishop, Deputy Zoning Administrator (DPD)
Jacqueline Kamp, Planner III, Zoning Administration Division (DPD)
Environmental Quality Advisory Council