

# 2025 EQAC Annual Report on the Environment

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall, the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) finds that the state of the environment in Fairfax County is good. The county has programs to address climate change and other environmental priorities. Residents and businesses expect a healthy environment, but further work will be needed to meet standards.

EQAC appreciates that FY2027 will be another challenging budget year, which has been made even more difficult and uncertain by the proposed cancellations of many federal grants. The loss of these grants, originally funded by the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, will adversely impact the county's climate-related efforts. EQAC appreciates the importance of this work for the county's future. For this reason, EQAC asks that the Board of Supervisors retain its environmental programs by pursuing new funding and seeking any of the "cancelled" federal grants that become available as a result of court challenges and other changes.

## EQAC Priority Recommendations

- **Climate and Resilience.** Maintain progress for the Community-Wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) and Resilient Fairfax.
- **Data Centers.** Develop a plan for data centers that mitigates impacts to local residents, supports progress towards carbon neutrality, and avoids unacceptable impacts to water resources.
- **Smart Growth.** Support "Smart Growth" to encourage businesses and high-density residential developments, to locate along public and non-motorized transportation corridors (e.g., Metrorail).
- **Zero Waste.** Support a county-wide zero waste plan and its implementation.
- **Transportation.** Support Transit-Oriented Development and the use of public transit (and other relevant efforts) to reduce the need for single occupancy vehicle trips.
- **Heat Islands and Trees:** Enhance the tree canopy in high-density residential and commercial areas, especially along transit corridors, and where mitigating actions will also offer co-benefits like an improved quality of life, mental health, and community aesthetics.

They are supported by the 17 recommendations in the Annual Report on the Environment Scorecard.

## Legislative Priorities and Memoranda

In addition to the [2025 EQAC Annual Report on the Environment](#), EQAC provides timely recommendations to the Board of Supervisors through memoranda and Legislative Recommendations, listed in Appendix B. Topics covered in the 2025 legislative recommendations, in priority order, are:

- **Data centers:** The energy and water challenges associated with data centers must be addressed at a state or possibly regional level. A critical first step would be to require public reporting of planned and measured use of energy and water. Similarly, reporting of estimated and measured noise levels at facility boundaries is needed.
- **Forever chemicals:** Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which are also known as forever chemicals, are common in many consumer products. Virginia should join with other states that have already banned these chemicals in consumer products.
- **Recycling organic and food waste:** Organic and food waste constitutes a significant part of the waste stream in Fairfax County. States and many localities (including multiple neighboring Virginia counties) have adopted programs to recycle food waste. EQAC encourages the Board to pursue legislation that will allow the county to require such food waste recycling.
- **Single use plastic bag ban:** Fairfax County has a 5-cent tax on single use plastic bags, which has cut plastic bag use by 7.5%. A tax of only 5 or 10 cents will not substantially reduce plastic bag use and the resulting litter in our roadways, streams and woods. Bans are used widely in other states and internationally because they are much more effective. EQAC recommends seeking legislative authority to institute such a ban.
- **Building energy efficiency:** Buildings account for 40% of Fairfax GHG emissions. The county is limited in its ability to require building energy efficiency. Efficiency is not only important to reducing GHG emissions but will also reduce energy use and associated costs. The Commonwealth should either adopt stronger energy efficiency standards in the Uniform Statewide Building Code or permit local jurisdictions to require more stringent standards.
- **Solar Energy:** The solar energy legislative recommendation would provide localities the ability to require solar panels over parking lots and on building roofs. The electrical demands of data centers in Virginia have moved the state from an exporter of energy to an importer of energy and now power plants that use fossil fuels are being pressed into service to help meet energy demands.

## Successes!

EQAC appreciates the Board's attention to the environment. In particular, EQAC thanks the Board for directing the County Executive to develop recommendations to address illegal dumping. EQAC also appreciates the Board Matter on Unified Sanitary Districts (USDs) as EQAC has sought a more comprehensive recycling program with higher recycling rates. The development of options considering USDs, non-USD and perhaps hybrid options should generate information that allows a consensus for moving forward.

EQAC coordinated with the Planning Commission in a review of the Comprehensive Plan update. The Planning Commission's efforts to bring different county advisory groups together to facilitate this review are commendable.

## Final Remarks

Fairfax County is fortunate to have a strong base of environmental policies, talented county staff to meet these challenges, and a Board that has invested in the environment to improve the quality of life for all. We thank the Board of Supervisors for its leadership on environmental issues. While EQAC has recommendations to adjust programs and undertake additional work, we see these recommendations as important feedback that the Board can use to inform adjustments to programs.