

**COUNTY OF FAIRFAX
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ADVISORY COUNCIL (EQAC)**

**MEETING MINUTES
DATE: February 8, 2023
TIME: Start: 7:15 p.m. - 10:45 p.m.
LOCATION: Virtually, via Zoom**

EQAC Member Attendance

Name	Present/ Absent*	Name	Present/ Absent*
Larry Zaragoza (Chair, Mount Vernon)	P	Renee Grebe (Vice-Chair, At-Large)	P
Johna Gagnon (Franconia)	P	Stella Koch (At-Large)	P
Richard Healy (Mason)	P	Jacob Hammond (Student Member)	P
Ken Gubin (Dranesville)	P	George Lamb (At-Large)	P
Ken Lanfear (Hunter Mill)	P	Bryan Campbell (Braddock)	P
Elisa Meara (Providence)	P	Mike Zatz (At-Large)	P
Rich Weisman (Sully)	P	Clyde Wilber (Springfield)	p

* P indicates present; A indicates absent

Staff Attendance

Rachel Flynn, County Executive's Office (CEX)
Sara Girello, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC)
Susan Hafeli (OEEC)
Neely Law (OEEC)
Matt Meyers (OEEC)
John Morrill (OEEC)
Kelly Zitzer (OEEC)
Gina Well (OEEC)
Austin Gastrell, Department of Planning and Development (DPD)
Leslie Johnson (DPD)
Tracy Strunk (DPD)
Matthew Hansen Land Development Services (LDS)
Bill Hicks (LDS)

Visitor Attendance

Jennifer Cole (Clean Fairfax)
Christopher Forinash
Donna Jacobson
Eleanor Kluegel
Andrea Lewis
Whitney Redding

Agenda Items, Discussion, Decisions and Votes

1. Chair Zaragoza introduced the requirements to allow EQAC to meet virtually. He asked that all members introduce themselves and following, he made MOTION that EQAC certify that today's virtual meeting comports with EQAC's adopted policy for all-virtual meetings. He further moved that EQAC conduct this meeting electronically through a dedicated video- and audio-conferencing line, and that the public may access this meeting through the Zoom link provided on tonight's agenda or by calling **404-443-6397** and entering access code 544236. The motion was seconded by Johana Gagnon, to proceed with the **all** virtual meeting, and was passed unanimously.

2. **Plastic Bag Tax and Disbursement**

Susan Hafeli, Deputy Director, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination, (OEEC), presented the results of the first ten months of the single-use plastic bag tax.

Ms. Hafeli reported that revenue to the county in the first ten months of the tax totaled \$2.1 million. She viewed this as a surprising amount, considering that the Virginia legislation is more limited than some jurisdictions; it does not cover all retailers, but only grocery, convenience, and drug stores. In the first year, the retailer can retain two of the five cents collected. The three cents per bag submitted to the county indicates about 70 million plastic bags were distributed.

There is no data on how many bags were utilized prior to the tax going into effect, but anecdotal information from Clean Fairfax indicated significant reductions in plastic bags encountered in two streams that the group monitors.

The bag tax revenue, per the legislation, is to be used for environmental purposes, including distribution of free bags to SNAP and WIC recipients. County agencies are submitting proposals for how to use the funds, which will be evaluated and ranked, and a memo proposing uses will ultimately be submitted to the Board of Supervisors. Ms. Hafeli indicated the use of the funds will be supplementary to normal tax revenues appropriated for environmental purposes. The county is looking for innovative uses for the bag tax revenue. Funds will be distributed twice a year.

Ms. Hafeli indicated the county will be doing more outreach about the environmental programs funded by the tax. The tax is a consciousness-raiser about the need to reduce single-use plastic.

3. **Charge-up Fairfax**

John Morrill, Division Director, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination, (OEEC), reported on Charge Up Fairfax, the county's program to increase electric vehicle (EV) charging sites. Parking for urban and suburban living may lack charging stations in garages and other dedicated parking. The county aims to assist HOAs and condo associations who want to install EV charging stations in community settings.

To obtain support from ChargeUp Fairfax, the HOAs and Condominium Associations will need to present proposals demonstrating their readiness for the project, such as establishing community agreement, the source of funding, and the availability of sites with electricity. Proposals will then be ranked. After the communities have completed this preliminary work, a county contractor will do a feasibility study. It is the association's decision whether or not to move forward. It is estimated that a typical installed cost will be around \$20,000 per station. The county will provide up to 1/3rd of the cost, up to \$5,000, along with some guidance. The county is very conscious of One Fairfax goals and wants to avoid the impression that EV charging stations are just for wealthy communities. The county will make a special effort in this regard.

OEEC hopes to launch a pilot program in March or April, involving two or three communities. By the fall, it will evaluate lessons learned during the pilot phase and the feasibility for a full program.

OEEC is monitoring federal funding opportunities carefully and is awaiting federal guidance. It has already made an application to DOE for EV charging grant funding.

Bill Hicks, Director of Land Development Services, reported that the county will waive building and electrical fees associated with installing EV charging stations until April 2024.

It was estimated there could be 50,000 townhouses that need access to EV charging stations. There are 1,700 HOA and condo associations in Fairfax.

4. Parking Reimagined

Matthew Hansen, Division Director, Land Development Services, (LDS), responded to the January 13th EQAC memo, which stated opposition to the current Parking Reimagined plans. He discussed the goals of the Parking Reimagined program, which are to modernize parking requirements and avoid mandating unneeded parking spaces. The regulations had not been revised since 1988. He discussed the environmental benefits that can come from the parking changes, even though the effort is not an environment program. Austin Gastrell, Planner III, Department of Planning and Development, (DPD), and project lead for Parking Reimagined, also discussed the ancillary environmental benefits such as less impervious ground, reduced fluid pollutants, reduced heat island effects, better storm water management and mitigation, reduced vehicle emissions.

Mr. Gastrell offered draft ordinance examples such as parking adjustments to conserve or enhance existing trees or greenspace, counting of EV spaces towards required parking, permitting alternative surfaces such as semi-porous grid paving systems in parking areas, and parking redesignation plans no longer required for installation of EV, solar canopies, or bicycle infrastructure.

Mr. Gastrell explained how Parking Reimagined supports the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan, (CECAP), through four actions; streamlining of the processes related to EV and solar canopy installation, implementing bicycle parking minimum requirements, implementing pedestrian route standards, and promoting shared parking, and a tiered

framework to reduce parking rates in densely populated areas with better access to public transit.

Mr. Gastrell described how Parking Reimagined supports Resilient Fairfax and One Fairfax through actions such as reducing required parking infrastructure through reduced parking requirements thus reducing heat-generating land development, decreasing impervious surface requirements, adjusting of parking requirements to conserve or enhance greenspace and tree canopy, and promoting quality-built environments that accommodates growth and promotes housing and services for all people. He then provided the project timeline.

Mr. Lanfear pointed out that the original proposal had not made clear that the reduction in parking would not translate into increased building size. Mr. Hansen said that there is a misconception that reduction of parking space requirements is a give-away to developers. Reducing parking provides county benefits.

Chair Zaragoza mentioned the opportunities for increased green spaces, and solar panel installation on buildings and above parking, and inquired about equity concerns. Mr. Gastrell responded that Parking Reimagined deals with parking spaces and that solar will be addressed in other county actions. However, Parking Reimagined looked for methods to incentive installation by eliminating redesignation plan requirements, reducing hurdles, and adding more administrative approvals for reductions that benefit EVs and solar panels.

Chris Forinash, consultant with Nelson\Nygaard, then addressed questions regarding equity issues and affordability. He explained that One Fairfax allows the prioritization of those who walk, bike, and utilize public transportation. Lowering the amount of parking and improvements to code, such as requiring safer pedestrian pathways from transit stops, all work together to support equity and affordability.

Vice-Chair Grebe asked if reduced parking would enhance a developer's ability to seek an increased floor area ratio (FAR), allowing for greater building density but not necessarily a lead to additional green space. Mr. Forinash said a request for greater density connected to reduce parking would not be automatically granted. Rather, it would be subject to public hearing, proffers, and other considerations. The overall net environmental benefit of less parking is likely the reduction in impervious surfaces.

Chair Zaragoza questioned whether the proposed parking ratio is too tight, based on his experience with an HOA in Arlington. Mr. Forinash said that reducing parking allows affordability to be built into a project. It prioritizes people who walk or take transit. Lowering required parking can also lead to safe walking paths and supports equity.

Ms. Koch remarked that the initial Parking Reimagined presentation was not complete; that is, it did not reflect a holistic approach to all the considerations that parking entails. This is what led the council to state its objections.

Mr. Lamb agreed that the Parking Reimagined plan that led to the EQAC letter was not holistic (relating to all factors, such as water management, green spaces, bigger benefits of the parking reduction.) Clyde Wilber also thought that the plan was not sufficient.

Tracy Strunk, Director, Department of Planning and Development, noted that there is a difference between the Comprehensive Plan, and the regulatory rules under it (i.e. zoning ordinances). There is no desire to construct unneeded parking spaces.

Mr. Hicks reiterated that Parking Reimagined deals with the rules (the details); it was not intended to deal with everything. It differs from the Comprehensive Plan. Staff was taken aback by EQAC stating that it did not support the project. Larry expressed his appreciation for staff laying out the environmental benefits of Parking Reimagined. He was grateful for staff reaching out and wants to promote a dialogue to improve things.

Ms. Koch said it was not that EQAC does not support Parking Reimagined, but the plan presented was not enough for EQAC to support it. The plan needed acknowledgment of the larger picture and that what Parking Reimagined is doing now is just a piece of that. Mr. Hicks said the next white paper will be broader and hopefully satisfy EQAC concerns.

5. Annual Report on the Environment (ARE)

Neely Law discussed the four priority recommendations of the EQAC Annual Report on the Environment (ARE). All of the recommendations have a common theme, to improve processes to minimize ecological degradation from development pressure. This is an opportune time to examine this issue as 2023 will see amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and environment policy.

DPD would like to present to EQAC the by-right entitlement development land process: how ecological resources are impacted or improved by this process and what needs to be improved to minimize ecological degradation. At the last meeting, it was suggested that a few EQAC members could function as liaisons to county staff, to better define the appropriate issues. Ms. Koch, Mr. Lamb and Mr. Campbell formed a committee to serve as liaisons. Mr. Zatz, even though he is stepping off the council, may participate. Ms. Koch urged that EQAC not be too specific in the guidance, so as not to minimize the potential for gain.

A new Climate Action Dashboard, which will be an accessible website with metrics to track implementation of initiatives such as the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) and Resilient Fairfax, will be active in early March. The Dashboard addresses the fourth priority recommendation of the ARE, relating to a climate plan to track the implementation of CECAP. While the Dashboard will not track the statewide Virginia Clean Economy Act, (VCEA), the progress is being followed at a high level.

Chair Zaragoza and Mr. Gubin will help with the Dashboard. EQAC hopes to be a sounding board as the Dashboard is developed, so that it appeals to an average consumer.

Mr. Lanfear discussed a proposed process for putting together the ARE that he had drafted. All agreed that the report should follow the BOS environmental priorities, but there could be confusion with what constitutes an EQAC recommendation or just a concern. Ken L. favors the concept of issues, rather than recommendations. Various recommendations can constitute one issue. While the Scorecard in the ARE is popular, it is essentially backward looking, not forward looking.

Mr. Lanfear said that the current 31 recommendations within the ARE are too many for the Board of Supervisors. Ken suggested separating the Scorecard into critical recommendations within each chapter. The rest would be presented separately. There was discussion that picking the most significant recommendations needed to wait until the entire report was reviewed to avoid missing something significant. Mr. Lanfear proposed that each chapter of the ARE be assigned a reviewer from within the Council, who would review the chapter prior to its presentation to the full Council. Thus, improving the process for approving the chapter and its recommendations.

Chair Zaragoza asked that the Council members review Mr. Lanfear's proposal and postponed voting on its adoption until next month. A list of chapter reviewers should also be adopted next month. Ms. Koch suggested the chapter writer should indicate who they prefer to review their work. Council members should notify Chair Zaragoza of which chapters they would be interested in reviewing.

Dr. Law urged EQAC to keep in mind is the ARE audience. She suggested some information could be placed in an addendum to keep the ARE itself from being too voluminous.

6. Site Specific Plan Amendments (SSPA).

Vice Chair Grebe described the updated the SSPA process which is new this year as it is now countywide. SSPAs are single-site projects proposed by developers but looked at in terms of their impact on the Comprehensive Plan. There is initially a nomination process, seeking approval to proceed to have the project considered. After that, the project still goes through all normal reviews. The new change this year is that the projects will be reviewed by the Planning Commission, with public comment taken. Seventy-five nominations were made this year; five of these were removed by the Board of Supervisors. Feedback on the remaining seventy will be sought. EQAC has prepared a memo to the Planning Commission, urging that county environmental policies be considered and prioritized when evaluating proposals. Vice-Chair Grebe made a MOTION to adopt the letter, as slightly edited during discussion. This motion was SECONDED by Ms. Koch and PASSED unanimously.

7. January Minutes Mr. Campbell moved to accept the January 2023 minutes. Mr. Lanfear seconded the motion, and it carried by a vote of 13-0-1, with Mr. Zatz abstaining.

8. Chair's Items

Chair Zaragoza and Vice Chair Grebe had a discussion with the Tree Commission chair, vice chair, and county managers about amending the charter of the Tree Commission (which is contained in an ordinance.) Chair Zaragoza thought the recommended changes to the Tree

Commission were valuable, and he suggested that Mr. Healy update the EQAC charter as well. This update will be put on as a future agenda item.

Chair Zaragoza also shared that there is a Mt. Vernon Town Hall Meeting this Saturday.

9. Council Members Items

Ms. Koch asked when public comments would be heard on the budget. Dr. Law said it was set for April 11th, 12th, and 13th. This is after the next EQAC meeting, allowing EQAC time to review the budget before then.

Ms. Koch also noted that the wording of the EQAC letter re Parking Reimagined could have been said differently. The bald opening comment that we rejected the report was harsh.

Mr. Campbell noted that the Park Authority elected new leadership. He shared that was some interesting discussion at the last meeting about tree maintenance.

Ms. Gagnon mentioned that at the Franconia district open house, she talked with the vice chair of the Fairfax Water Authority. The general manager can talk to EQAC about PFAs. However, she was told that Fairfax Water is not as worried about PFAs as lead pipes, which is its highest priority. Mr. Lanfear was surprised at this, as he said EQAC had been told recently there were no lead service pipes. Ms. Gagnon is the EQAC representative on the board of Fairfax Joint Local Emergency Planning Committee (FJLEPC). She will send out minutes of the meetings and note any highlights of interest to EQAC.

Mr. Zatz explained why he will be leaving the Council after four years. He has time constraints that do not allow him to devote the time needed for the Council. Chair Zaragoza expressed the sentiment of the Board that he will be missed.

Vice Chair Grebe noted that there is a Lake Accotink dredging meeting at Park Authority meeting coming up and urged that people to pay attention to it.

Vice Chair Grebe reported that the alternative tree planting standards that EQAC suggested were adopted by the Board. Tree canopy credits for third place trees were reduced to .5 from .75, and a big win. This results in trees planted in the most constrained sites getting even lower credits. Staff provided an equity impact statement.

Vice Chair Grebe also noted a bill passed by the Virginia House of Delegates allows developers to cut down forests with full storm water exemptions provided they sell the wood. This is an interesting item to pay attention to.

Staff Items:

- 1) Dr. Law noted that the County's Declaration of a Local State of Emergency prompted by the COVID-19 virus is due to end March 1st.
- 2) The date for the award of Environmental Excellence is March 28, at 6 pm.
- 3) There will be a March 8th, 10 am to noon, virtual meeting of the Community of Trees. Dr. Law encouraged EQAC members to monitor the meeting and report back.

- 4) Dr. Law reminded members that all meeting materials distributed to them also are posted on the EQAC website and materials for distribution need to be received week prior to the meeting.
- 5) It is time to begin recruitment for next year's student member, as well as recommendations for the Environmental Excellence awards. Mr. Lanfear and Mr. Zatz were the committee for the awards last year. Mr. Gubin and Mr. Weisman constituted the committee for student recruitment. Ms. Girello said the distribution process seeking student member nominations will be more comprehensive this year than last, which garnered few applicants.
- 6) Ms. Girello is still awaiting bios from some EQAC members, for internal distributions. These bios will not be posted on the website.
- 7) Mr. Meyers mentioned that the next Board of Supervisors Environmental Committee meeting will be on Feb. 28, with updates on Green Bank, CECAP implementation, and Resilient Fairfax.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 pm.