



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 2/16/2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Stella Koch, Chairman *Stella M. Koch*
Environmental Quality Advisory Council

SUBJECT: FY 2023 Budget Requests for Natural Resources

The Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) kindly requests the Board of Supervisors fund the following natural resource requests for the upcoming FY 2023 budget:

1. Tree cover -- Our trees must be preserved.
 - Fund three additional full-time positions for the Urban Forestry Management Division -- Very High Priority!
 - Maintain and preferably increase Fund 10030, Contributory Fund, to support tree planting efforts throughout the County.
2. Parks -- Our parks are seriously underfunded.
 - Fund two additional full time Ecologist positions, sufficient one-time startup costs, and \$300,000 per year to support an Ecological Maintenance Program for Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA).
 - Fund long-term fiscal planning for the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA)
3. Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) -- Provides many benefits.
 - Increase funding for the EIP to support new initiatives for invasive management and natural landscaping.

Justifications

1. Tree Cover

EQAC appreciates the Board of Supervisors' unanimous support on October 19, 2021 of the Plant NOVA Trees initiative¹ that aims to increase the native tree canopy in Northern Virginia. EQAC supports the Urban Forest Management Division (UFMD)'s FY 2023 preliminary budget request which includes a recommendation to add three new mission-critical positions in support of the work of UFMD, as mentioned in the Tree Commission's letter². These additional staff positions will better allow the UFMD team to rise to the challenge of providing the best site plan reviews it can, even as infill applications continue to increase.

¹ <http://www.plantnovatrees.org>, a campaign by Plant NOVA Natives

² Tree Commission letter to the Board of Supervisors dated November 17, 2021

There is a significant need to get more trees in the ground – both to meet Virginia’s Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan³ goals as well as the county’s own CECAP and Resilient Fairfax goals. These goals underscore the continued need to provide financial support to the 10030 Contributory Fund. This fund directly supports both Earth Sangha and Fairfax ReLeaf, both critical providers of native tree seedlings used in restoration efforts and conservation projects on private land.

2. Parks

While bond funding is critical to FCPA’s capital improvements, budget support is necessary to maintain these improvements. FCPA's Natural Resources Branch, for example, needs additional full-time Ecologist positions to support a growing workload of ecological maintenance activities. Of particular importance is the need for a higher level of sustained investment to control invasive plants, in addition to the critical Invasive Management Area (IMA) program, to ensure protection of our native plants and trees.

One of the most pressing needs of FCPA is a stable, recurring source of funding that would allow FCPA to take a longer-range approach to management and to successfully hire and retain full-time, skilled merit employees needed to support the management plans. This is particularly important as EQAC learned in the November 2021 joint meeting with the FCPA how understaffed the Natural Resources Branch is regarding Ecologist positions. This funding need is also reflected in the FCPA 2016 Needs Assessment finding that \$2,350 per acre per year⁴ is what FCPA needs to maintain their natural lands. However, FCPA has only cents on the dollar to spend towards this need today. EQAC recognized that it will take years to achieve the funding levels required, and the Council asks for this fiscal planning to be addressed.

3. Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) -- provides many benefits.

Funding of the EIP has provided funding for many worthwhile projects that have often helped the county save money or energy or both. EQAC encourages the Board to continue to place a priority on EIP funding. Financial support for initiatives such as the Invasive Management Area (IMA) program and projects in support of the recently adopted Natural Landscape Implementation Plan are critical to both maintaining healthy trees and planting new native trees.

In Conclusion

As Fairfax County faces growing impacts from a changing climate, EQAC asks the Board to make the FY23 budget and funding investments today in our tree canopy and natural resources that will pay dividends in decades to come.

cc: Bryan J. Hill

³ Phase III WIP: <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/water/chesapeake-bay/phase-iii-wip>

⁴ 1.4 Natural Resources Assessment:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/plandev/parkscount/needs-assessment-plan-050616.pdf#page=10>