



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 20, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

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

SUBJECT: Fairfax County Litter Task Force – Final Report Dated December 14, 2021

EQAC commends the work of the Litter Task Force and supports the recommendations contained therein. The task force worked diligently for fifteen months, and the final report presents thoughtful recommendations organized into three categories. The short-term opportunities are easily applied to county operations and can be quickly implemented. The medium-term opportunities drive long-term systemic improvements that address the root causes of litter in the environment. These are of particular interest to EQAC as they focus on preventing everyday household waste from entering the environment and becoming litter.

The following medium-term recommendations align together to keep trash in the waste stream where it belongs, rather than entering the environment:

- Revise applicable ordinances to prohibit the use of bags for overnight refuse set-out.
- Enforce current standards (“No Garbage on the Ground”) of adequate waste collection service for medium and high-density housing.
- Re-evaluate the methodology used to calculate capacity and servicing needs for new and existing developments.
- Better ordinances to prohibit bags will prevent wildlife from opening the trash.
- Keeping trash off the ground in medium and high-density housing, will keep it out of reach from wildlife and the elements.
- Properly calculating the required capacity eliminates overflow situations that lead to a soiled environment.

The Litter Task Force considered but did not recommend implementing a No Charge Programⁱ for litter control. The Litter Task Force choose to focus on controlling litter before it occurs and understandably did not include No Charge in its recommendations because No Charge Programs address litter after it has occurred. While EQAC agrees that controlling litter before it occurs can advance litter control substantially, the No Charge program has multiple social and environmental benefits worthy of consideration in addition to providing another litter control resource. EQAC

recommends the Board consider a No Charge program to augment Operation Stream Shield and for invasive species control.

Enforcement:

The Litter Task Force recommends enforcement of current standards (“No Garbage on the Ground”). The county code requires residents to prevent litter around solid waste collection containers and haulers to provide adequate collection and further to “pick up litter that may have gathered around the collection container or been released during transportation.” The county has issued very few violations of these code requirements. Instead, the county has relied on counselling haulers and property owners to address this litter issue. EQAC recommends the county inform haulers and residents that the code will be vigorously enforced to eliminate litter from collection sites. All observed violations of the code should be recorded. Repeat violations by haulers should be subject to the revocation of their Certificate to Operate, as called for in the code.

The Litter Task Force recommends the county establish a litter and illegal dumping enforcement unit. Several years ago, EQAC asked the Department of Code Compliance (DCC) to track dumping complaints. While there have been some substantial illegal litter and dump incidences, DCC staff have indicated that very few illegal dumping complaints have been recorded in recent years. Before establishing a new enforcement unit, the Board may wish to consider charging DCC with an outreach task to ensure that residents know who to call when illegal dumping or litter collecting around waste containers is found. If the complaint level increases and current staff are inadequate to address the violations, a separate unit may be considered.

The combination of systematic focus on reducing opportunities for trash to enter the environment along with stricter enforcement provides the county with a clear path forward. EQAC thanks the litter task force for their work and recommendations and looks forward to a cleaner environment.

SMK:CW:nhk

cc: Litter Task Force Members

ⁱNo Charge Programs divert persons arrested for minor offenses from prosecution. Typically implemented through the Prosecuting Attorney Offices, such programs provide a meaningful and cost-effective alternative in which offenders perform community service (e.g., litter pick up, invasive species removal) to dispose of their criminal case, reduce financial impact to the court and the community.