



The Fairfax County Tree Commission  
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May 19, 2022

Jeffrey McKay, Chairman  
Dan Storck, Environmental Committee Chairman  
Members, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
12000 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035

Sent by email to: [clerktothebos@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:clerktothebos@fairfaxcounty.gov)

### **Recommendations on Implementing the County-Wide Energy and Climate Action Plan**

Dear Chairman McKay, Supervisor Storck, and all members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors:

On March 17, 2022, the Tree Commission (TC) received an update from the Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC) on implementing the County-Wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP). Since the CECAP workplan will not be in the BOS's hands for consideration until December 2022, the TC is submitting these additional comments to consider as that plan is developed. We thank you in advance for accepting our input as you work to meet your goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050.

The county's development of CECAP was inspired by data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) showing the consequences of not meeting the Paris Agreement's goal to keep global warming less than 2 degrees (and ideally less than 1.5 degrees) over pre-industrial temperatures. In February 2022, the IPCC's updated report on "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability" noted that even the current amount of warming (the earth is now about 1.1 degrees warmer) is having disastrous and irreversible impacts on biodiversity, water quality, food production and other measurements of a healthy global system. When the CECAP implementation plan sets out the county-wide coordinated effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Tree Commission supports measures to save and expand our threatened natural resources, especially trees, to help increase carbon sequestration and other urban forest benefits. The environmental vision and goals of the 2019 Tree Action Plan offer a positive roadmap for that effort.

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/sites/publicworks/files/assets/documents/treearctionplan.pdf>.

On November 17, 2021 the Tree Commission's 2021 Consolidated Annual Report and submission letter to the BOS included important comments on the CECAP that the TC still supports. See here:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/sites/publicworks/files/assets/documents/11-16-21-tc-ltr-annual-report-submission-and-cecap-recommendations.pdf>.

In addition, the following Tree Commissioner comments at the March 2022 OEEC presentation reflect several years of ongoing TC discussion about CECAP's proposed actions to preserve and expand the county's tree canopy:

- The most important low-cost action for all CECAP sectors—which requires little to no actual spending—is to preserve the tree canopy that we have.
- Critical land use actions suggested in Strategy 12 should be moved to Strategy 8 to help preserve our current urban forest.
- The Community of Practice could be used to fulfill CECAP's Strategy 12c.
- Solar and trail project planning must include careful determination of how best to preserve the urban forest's tree canopy.
- The critical importance of outreach and education about urban forest preservation and expansion should be elevated.
- It is encouraging to see CECAP set a new tree canopy goal to achieve.
- Reaching the 40% canopy coverage in all census tracts must include recognizing and rising to challenges in areas with large amounts of impermeability (asphalt, concrete, etc.).

Finally, the TC recently completed a survey to prioritize suggested natural resource and tree actions from the CECAP report. We recommend that these priorities be shared with the staff group working on the implementation plan. See Attachment 1 below for the TC survey's top five rankings and comments.

The Tree Commission greatly appreciates your dedication and commitment to leading on climate and environmental issues, and we specifically thank you for your ongoing championship of our urban forest. The Tree Commission is proud to serve in this endeavor. Consistent focus on action in all areas, and specifically on natural resources and trees, is critical in mitigating the effects of our rapidly changing climate in order to get to the carbon neutrality we all seek.

Sincerely,

*Please email [TreeCommission@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:TreeCommission@fairfaxcounty.gov) for official signed version of letter*

Cindy Speas, Chair  
Member-at-large  
Fairfax County Tree Commission

cc: Kambiz Agazzi, Director of Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination  
Matt Myers, Manager Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination  
Fairfax County Planning Commission  
Stella Koch, Environmental Quality Advisory Council  
Lindsey Martin, Staff Aide to Chairman McKay  
Camela Speer, Staff Aide to Supervisor Storck

**See Attachment 1 below.**

## Attachment 1: Tree Commission Survey - Priorities for CECAP Implementation

### Prioritized EDUCATION ACTIONS

1. “Monitor tree cover changes using satellite imagery urban tree canopy analyses to assess current conditions and determine how forests & urban tree ecosystems change over time.”
2. “Ensure that environmental planning and the importance of green spaces to communities is a central part of any development project—from redesigning a yard to building a new apartment complex.”
3. “County-wide and site-specific inventories of trees in advance of proposed development can minimize impacts to and loss of high-quality trees and natural vegetative communities.”
4. “Broad educational programs on the importance and value of natural resources and trees.”
5. “Regularly report tree canopy data to the public.”

**NOTE from TC:** Phase 1 of the CECAP implementation plan for educational and outreach programming is entitled “Carbon Free Fairfax.” Our top five survey priorities (see above) can be summarized into three points:

1. **Data education:** “Monitor tree cover changes (using satellite imagery and urban tree canopy analyses) to assess current conditions and determine how forests and urban tree ecosystems change over time, and regularly report that data to the public.” **NOTE from TC:** This would be a fascinating way to educate how policy and personal choices influence the growth or loss of tree canopy over time.
2. **Land use goal outreach:** “Ensure that the broader community understands the importance of green spaces to their quality of life, and that any development project—from redesigning a yard to building a new apartment complex—can choose to minimize impacts to and loss of high-quality trees and natural vegetative communities.” **NOTE from TC:** Vegetative communities mean groups of plants from trees to ground cover that ecologically support each other in the food web (fungi, insects, birds, small mammals, etc.). There are important ecological choices for every landowner and developer.
3. **Educational programming:** “Highlight the importance of natural resources and trees in mitigating the effects of climate change, and also in providing environmental, social, economic, health and other benefits to Fairfax County citizens.” **NOTE from TC:** This is low hanging fruit. Residents are interested in trees and their benefits. Now is the time to educate about how caring for trees has multiple benefits.

### Prioritized COUNTY ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION NOW

1. “Create a cross-disciplinary county staff team to analyze existing programs and policies across the county to evaluate where climate change and natural resources intersect that includes mitigation plus adaptation and resiliency.” **NOTE from TC:** This is actually Strategy 12c. It is our understanding that Resilient Fairfax’s Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Plan is likely to suggest and support this critical action.

2. "Use research and inventory data to conduct land use reviews that ensure that local policies will prioritize open space [and] better value and preserve natural areas. The county could also use this information to reform how land is sold, and coordinate new and expanded green areas with new or existing trails to create a network of green spaces." **NOTE from TC:** Land use decisions must be reviewed to prioritize preserving and expanding our urban forest. Data is key in these decisions.
3. "Require a higher density tree canopy replacement in development projects."
4. "Strengthen existing county voluntary programs that conserve and expand green spaces and trees." **NOTE from TC:** We agree that "The Fairfax County Tree Action Plan provides a guiding structure through which the county can develop programs that conserve existing young and mature trees to help improve soils, filter groundwater, and remove air pollutants...[and use] other urban areas as models."
5. "Pursue the expansion of financial tools, such as the Tree Preservation and Planting Fund, to include tree planting in private spaces." **NOTE from TC:** This could include, but not be limited to, developing public-private partnerships, supporting Green Bank funding, and increasing county funding of Earth Sangha and ReLeaf Fairfax.

#### **Prioritized Incentives in CECAP for Future County Implementation**

1. "Incentivize ~~more~~ [sic] infill development[ers] to conserve existing tree canopies and green spaces, and reevaluate the existing Infill Development Review Process to incorporate best practices for preserving mature tree canopy." Specific actions include, but are not limited to: (see Options table below). **NOTE from TC:** This section and the Options for Priority 1 should be relocated to Strategy 8. The TC firmly believes that land use policies should foremost require the preservation of healthy tree canopy to the maximum allowed by Virginia code.
  - a. "Require a tree preservation plan first, before the stormwater, utility, and building plans are prepared and before any accessory project, such as a deck, shed, etc."
  - b. "Ban the removal of mature trees in resource protection areas, buffers, or flood plains."
  - c. "Change (increase) property boundary setback requirements, particularly on smaller lots."
  - d. "Establish stiff penalties for unpermitted removal of trees and/or damaging preserved trees in any building process."
  - e. "Reduce the allowed amount of impermeability on any size of lot."
2. "Incentivize or require conservation of tree canopies or green spaces in development projects, such as a regulation that restricts the removal of mature trees, and building designs and construction strategies that incorporate green space protection."
3. "Incentivize developers and homeowners to reduce clearing, grading, or otherwise disturbing soils for development because soils provide important carbon sequestration."