

City of Falls Church

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Originating Dept. Head: City Manager Wyatt Shields		

**City of Falls Church
Environmental Sustainability Council
2020 Annual Report**

This report summarizes the 2021 goals of the City's Environmental Sustainability Council (ESC) and its activities and accomplishments in 2020. The ESC advises the City Council on a range of environmental issues affecting our City and its residents. It meets monthly and has nine positions, all of which were filled at year end. Andrew Young serves as the Chair of the ESC, and Stacey Evers serves as the Vice Chair. This year the ESC had six high-school student participants.

Three ESC sub-committees also advance environmental progress in Falls Church City: the Education Task Group (ETG), led by Tina Ho; the Energy Transition Sub-Committee (ETS), led by Jon Ward; and the Habitat Restoration Task Group (HRTG), led by Amy Crumpton. Membership in these sub-committees is open to any City resident. Kate Walker, the City's Environmental Programs Coordinator, serves as staff liaison for the ESC, ETS and ETG. Jeremy Edwards, the City's Green Space Manager, is staff liaison for the HRTG.

2021 City of Falls Church Sustainability Goals

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments recently published the results of its regional and community greenhouse gas inventory, analyzing data from 2018. While results show that emissions in the region declined 13% since 2005, emissions in the City of Falls Church were reduced only 2%, as emissions reduction activities were not sufficient to offset increased emissions from energy use due to growth within the City. The ESC believes the City of Falls Church and its citizens **can do more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions** and will advocate for the following three goals in 2021 to make progress:

#1 - Lead by example on energy efficiency: The ESC applauds the recent decisions to move forward with LED streetlight replacements, as well implementing more ambitious criteria for consideration of Special Exception (SE) development requests (LEED Gold, Energy Use Intensity reduction). We look forward to working with partner boards and commissions to conduct a more robust review of the primary and secondary SE criteria together that enables stronger prioritization of environmental sustainability and affordability.

In addition, the ESC believes the city should follow the LED streetlight project with a more aggressive approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from city facilities and infrastructure by:

- Setting a net-zero energy target for all city facilities (municipal and schools);
- Pursuing creative contracting strategies to finance energy retrofits on all buildings not recently constructed or upgraded; and
- Developing a strategy for shifting all municipal energy use to renewable energy sources, through virtual Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), a Shared Solar program, or on-site installations."

These methods are already being pursued by neighboring jurisdictions and Falls Church should at a minimum follow suit.

#2 - Increase use of multi-modal transportation solutions: Falls Church, through its size, density, and public transportation access to the broader Washington Metropolitan Area, is well positioned to reduce its dependency on cars for daily activities. Significant steps have already been taken to make the City of Falls Church more walkable for its citizens, but to make further progress, the city needs to do more. The ESC was very excited to see the goal of **one mile of Protected Bike Lanes** in the most recent City Council Work Plan and believes this type of solution offers a number of interconnected benefits:

- Better accommodate the growth on the horizon (think about all the new residents at West Falls Church, Founders Row, and Broad/Washington all driving to the Farmers Market on Saturdays);
- Fight climate change (fewer trips for daily tasks and commuting – we are lucky to have access to two metro stations!);
- Improve the health of our citizens by promoting physical activity, particularly for our kids (how do we make cycling to school easier and safer?); and
- Bolstering equity by making it more possible to live in Falls Church without the cost of a car for transportation.

The ESC looks forward to partnering with the Citizens Advisory Council on Transportation (CACT) and other stakeholders in the City of Falls Church to see this vision through to reality.

#3 - Prepare for electric vehicles (EVs): The future of transportation is electric, and after years of anticipation, the transition is upon us. The City of Falls Church has made notable steps forward with its recent installation of charging stations at City Hall, influenced by leadership from the ESC's Energy Transition Subcommittee. Next steps for the city to take include:

- Educating the community on EV benefits, and demystifying the costs and challenges associated with home charger installations;
- Promoting the installation of EV chargers in workplace and multifamily locations, where demand from residents is likely ahead of building owner investments; and
- Preparing for a future municipal EV fleet, which will require out-year plans not only for replacing vehicles, but also for investing in the charging infrastructure to support them.

2020 Accomplishments

Despite the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ESC remained active in 2020, serving as an **advocate for sustainability** on policy and development efforts within the City of Falls Church. During 2020 the ESC provided input on the West Falls Church development project, the West End Small Area Plan (SAP), and the proposed Broad and Washington development project. Significant progress has been made over the last several years as

developers in the City of Falls Church are taking on more ambitious sustainability goals in their projects (LEED Gold versus LEED Silver), but much more can be done, particularly in the areas of reducing energy use and promoting sustainable practices such as electric vehicles.

The ESC successfully advocated that the City maintain its **annual Recycling Extravaganza and Household Hazardous Waste event**, which was held in October. This event is utilized by a wide range of citizens from across the City of Falls Church as a means of waste diversion, and it is viewed by the ESC as crucial for ensuring hazardous waste is not discarded into storm or sewer drains, into the soil, or with regular refuse and recycling.

The ESC provided input on the **LED streetlight replacement** Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) project, advocating for efficient use of investment dollars and the selection of Dark Sky Compliant fixtures that minimize light pollution and excess glare. The ESC is very excited to see the City of Falls Church move this project forward with its **quick return on investment** and associated **reduction in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions**.

The ESC was also active during 2020 discussing how to implement **urban agriculture** within the City of Falls Church, most notably through a proposal to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board to leverage the recently acquired **Fellows property** as a retreat and community-building space as well as a learning hub and showcase for environmental sustainability practices. The ESC looks forward to working with its partner committees and City Staff during 2021 on finalizing a Fellows property plan that meets a wide range of stakeholder interests and priorities.

Finally, the ESC would like to **recognize and thank Tim Stevens** for his long-tenured service to the City of Falls Church on behalf of environmental sustainability. Tim completed his tenure as the Chair of the Energy Transition Subcommittee (ETS) in December and his positive impact on the City's environmental footprint will be felt for years to come.

The ESC is honored to help support three active subcommittees that all continue to make significant contributions to the Falls Church community. Their 2020 accomplishments and 2021 goals are as follows:

Education Task Group 2020 Annual Report

During the 2019-2020 school year, 50 students participated in Operation EarthWatch (OpEW); TJ (24), MD (22), SJ (4). All 50 students received a free t-shirt, thanks to support from our long-standing community sponsors.

Before COVID-19 halted in-person learning and community events, OpEW school coordinators and volunteers supported the FCEPTA's International Night at TJ. Along with many other student organizations, clubs, businesses and individuals on display, we held a booth to provide information on the Operation EarthWatch program and to promote, with handmade signs, the newly placed purple bin for glass recycling. Students and families had fun taking selfies with the signs, and some helped spread the word by posting to the OpEW Facebook page. OpEW was unable to host its annual end-of-year picnic in the park, nor march in the Memorial Day parade, which was canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

To end the year, we held a virtual recognition ceremony for four student honorees with their families, OpEW school coordinators, Falls Church City Council members, sponsors, volunteers and others to celebrate their 6-years of OpEW participation and activism. Each student shared their best memories of OpEW. The students' names were engraved on the Falls Church-Annandale Lions Club plaque and each received a framed certificate. During the same ceremony, we recognized a 5th grader who created the winning t-shirt design for theme 'Stormwater: Only Rain in the Drains'.

We began the 2020-2021 school year with a virtual meeting, where we decided to conduct the OpEW program virtually due to COVID-19. We successfully refreshed the OpEW website with a new look and continued to allow students to upload their activities via an online form.

ETG Priorities for 2021

- Maintain/increase program participation through:
 - Use of social media (Facebook), web site, FCCPS Communications (The Morning Announcements), FCEPTA newsletters, email and other tools
 - School coordinators to engage and coordinate with teachers

- Virtual field trips and workshops

Energy Transition Subcommittee 2020 Annual Report

The ESC's Energy Transition Subcommittee (ETS) advised and encouraged City Council regarding staff's plans to replace streetlight fixtures with LEDs, a power-saving investment with a payback period of only a few years. It promoted the Solarize campaign and added targeted outreach to 34 residential properties with high rooftop solar potential. It wrote to Virginia's Board of Housing and Community Development encouraging full adoption of the 2018 International Energy Conservation Code, which Virginia has historically watered down before adopting. The ETS assisted City staff with content for a new City webpage on electric vehicles. It finished the year with a memo to City Council (a) quantifying the greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions needed for the City to meet MWCOC's goals for 2030 and (b) highlighting focus areas with the largest potentials for these reductions.

ETS Priorities for 2021

- Identifying and implementing approaches to **promote adoption of electric vehicles** by City residents and businesses.
- Recommending Voluntary Concessions within the zoning Special Exception process to **reduce GHG emissions from new construction**.

Habitat Restoration Task Group 2020 Annual Report

The Habitat Restoration Task Group delivered a strong performance in 2020, despite challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Spring 2020 HRT events were postponed, but intrepid members of the HRTG took initiative in Crossman, Cavalier and Cherry Hill Parks to remove garlic mustard instead. By Fall, we held four public events and found creative ways to expand our mission.

Highlights for 2020

- **Fall 2020 Habitat Restoration Team Public Events:** Four restoration planting and invasive removal events were held at Fellows, Crossman, and Herman (2x) Parks with 100 volunteers (limit of 25 per event) giving 200 hours of volunteer service to the City.
- **Community Wildlife Habitat Certifications:** Sandy Tarpinian, the City's liaison with the National Wildlife Federation, submitted paperwork to certify Madison and Herman Parks. Sandy's effort will result in new CWH signs in six parks in 2021 to refresh the message.
- **Invasive Plant of the Month Series:** To encourage residents to remove invasive plants in their own yards and to assist in general habitat restoration throughout the City, HRTG created month-by-month flyers that identify invasive plants and offer removal instructions. The flyers are placed in containers in several parks and are available on the City's [website](#). A special thanks to Melissa Teates for leading this initiative.
- **LDS Volunteers:** Jeremy Edwards and the Greenspace Crew held three restoration planting and invasive removal events for volunteers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). In Crossman Park, these volunteers planted and caged 130 tree saplings. In all, about 100 LDS volunteers gave 265 hours of volunteer service to the City. The HRTG is grateful to the LDS volunteers for this level of community involvement.

HRTG Priorities for 2021

- **Spring and Fall 2021 HRT Public Events:** We will follow public health guidance in determining a schedule for these events.
- **Public Education:** From April to May, two of our members will offer online talks via the Mary Riley Styles library on gardening for wildlife. We intend to expand on these events as well as the invasive plant of the month series to deliver more public education and technical advice on habitat restoration to residents of the City.
- **Fellows Park Planning:** HRTG will offer ecological assessment and restoration ideas as part of the public input process.