

City of Falls Church Environmental Sustainability Council 2022 Annual Report

This report summarizes the activities and accomplishments of the City of Falls Church Environmental Sustainability Council (ESC) in 2022, and sets out its goals for 2023. The ESC advises the City Council on environmental issues affecting the City and its residents. It meets monthly and has nine positions. Joseph Schiarizzi has served as Chair since January 2022. Jon Ward serves as the vice chair.

Three ESC sub-committees support our environmental policies and programs: the Energy Transition Subcommittee (ETS), led by Jon Ward; the Habitat Restoration Task Group (HRTG), led by Amy Crumpton, and the Education Task Group (ETG), which runs Operation EarthWatch, led by Tina Ho. Membership in these subcommittees is open to any City resident. Andy Young, the City's Environmental Sustainability Coordinator, serves as staff liaison for the ESC and its subcommittees.

2022 Accomplishments

At the request of City Council, ESC reviewed Proposed T-Zone Updates and advocated for increasing mixed use density to help us reach our regional climate goals by supporting walkable neighborhoods which are less car dependent. ESC noted that meeting housing demand and creating more affordable homes combats detrimental urban sprawl, and home energy efficiency also increases affordability for residents.

The ESC and CACT jointly hosted a webinar addressing the multiple challenges of building safe bike infrastructure in an already dense urban environment. Local planning experts presented their experience, and a lively panel discussion enabled us to learn from others' successes and explore how we can effectively implement our community goals for bikeability.

ESC endorsed a CACT letter encouraging the City Council to Prioritize Bikes Lanes and Micro-Mobility Infrastructure, as transportation is the largest contributor of carbon emissions in Falls Church (according to the 2015 study).

The ESC provided detailed comments and recommendations regarding the One City Center development project, both at the preliminary public meetings and formally in writing during the later Board and Commissions review process (Feb'22).

The ESC hosted the Executive Director of the DC-area chapter the Clean Cities Coalition to discuss possible steps the City could take to expand electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure and EV uptake (Sept'22).

In its comments on the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program budget (Apr'22), the ESC highlighted the importance of assuming increasingly intense rainfall in the funding of stormwater projects and of reducing fossil fuel use in upcoming HVAC upgrades at the community center and middle school and in new construction for the Capital Area Food Bank in Lorton.

Energy Transition Subcommittee

In 2022, the ETS wrote to City staff requesting that the language of the voluntary concessions (VCs) from Founders Row II related to rooftop solar be modernized and made more specific; much of the request was satisfied in the final accepted VCs. No other ETS-only policy or program documents were generated; all other formal correspondence to City Council, Planning Commission and City staff was issued through the full ESC. Key ETS-related products from the ESC included:

- Successful advocacy for the FY23 budget to include about \$50k to fund a Government Operations energy action plan, in parallel with the community plan. The ESC also asked that the government and schools lead by example, with a plan to reduce emissions faster than the community-wide goal (Aug'22).
- Recommendations that any T-Zone amendments include incentives for developers to reduce fossil fuel use in buildings newly authorized by the amendments, with greenhouse gas footprints below business-as-usual levels.

Habitat Restoration Task Group

283 volunteers donated 559 hours of their time in 2022 to help restore the ecology of City parks. Volunteers included local community members of all ages; Scout troops; FCCPS students; church groups; business groups, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists and Tree Stewards. A special thank you to Melissa Teates, HRTG Communications Coordinator, for publicity outreach and registration of volunteers. As COVID restrictions eased in 2022, the HRTG made strides in offering more in-person public environmental education while partnering with the FCCPS, the Mary Riley Styles Library, and FC Recreation and Parks. Highlights from 2022 include:

- **Spring 2022 HRT Public Volunteer Events:** The HRTG organized five invasive removal events in four parks: Cavalier, Crossman, Cherry Hill, and Howard Herman. *143 volunteers donated 285 hours* of their time.
- **Fall 2022 HRT Public Volunteer Events:** HRTG organized four events in two parks: Crossman and Howard Herman Parks. *134 volunteers* donated *268 hours* of their time.
- **Community Wildlife Habitat Certification:** Sandy Tarpinian, the City's liaison with the National Wildlife Federation, registered the City for CWH certification. Falls Church has been certified since 2015. The new pollinator garden installed by students at Meridian High School is the latest landscape to certify as a wildlife habitat and display a NWF sign.
- **Walk Through a Park Day (March 30):** *6 volunteers* donated *6 hours* of service to lead nature walks through Crossman and Howard Herman Parks. These events were organized and publicized by FC Recreation and Parks.
- **Public Education at Mary Riley Styles Library:** On April 30, Sandy Tarpinian led a

hands-on in-person class on “Container Gardening.” On May 14, Amy Crumpton offered a class on “Landscaping Tips for Managing Stormwater.” Sandy assembled a display on how to deter deer from home landscapes. Of note, the library now offers a new allied project in support of urban agriculture in the City. MHS student Isabel Costa developed a seed library for library patrons with free seeds donated by Hands on Harvest.

- **Public Education on Composting:** Sandy Tarpinian offered composting workshops in the spring and fall through the City’s Recreation and Parks programming. In addition, she taught a hands-on composting class for First Graders at Mt. Daniel.
- **Public Education on Native Plants and Urban Agriculture:** HRTG volunteers provided assistance to students in the Sustainability Program at Meridian High School as they designed and planted a vegetable garden and worked with the Pimmit Hills Pollinator Company on a native plant pollinator garden. At Oak Street Elementary, HRTG volunteers resuscitated raised beds with native plants for a demonstration garden.

Education Task Group

During the 2021-2022 school year 31 students completed the Operation EarthWatch program. All were offered free t-shirts thanks to our community sponsors and were invited to participate in the Memorial Day Parade, the first opportunity to do so since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. A meeting was also held with key stakeholders in March 2022 to explore opportunities for revitalizing Operation EarthWatch, which helped lead to a revitalized kickoff in the fall.

2023 ESC Goals

The 2040 Vision of the City of Falls Church affirms that the City will strive to be a leader in environmental sustainability. One element of achieving that goal is to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, as committed to by City Council in 2017 and reaffirmed in 2020. The City is currently not on track to meet our own, or regional, emissions reduction goals by 2030. The ESC believes the City of Falls Church and its community need to do more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by planning for and implementing significant changes in the ways we travel, the places we live and work, and our way of life. At the same time, greater emphasis should be placed on developing climate resilience, the ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to the effects of climate change. In order to support the City and community in addressing these challenges, the ESC will focus on the following goals in 2023:

1. Reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions

- Continue advocacy for policies and actions to support increased use of alternatives to fossil fuel powered single occupancy vehicles, including improved transit options, and safe routes for cycling, micro transit and walking around the City. The ESC is already working with CACT and other stakeholders to explore opportunities for protected bike lanes.
- Support staff education and outreach efforts to assist homes and commercial properties

with EV charging infrastructure installation.

2. Support sustainability and resilience in the built environment

- Conduct a robust review of SE criteria and voluntary concessions to determine how to more strongly prioritize environmental sustainability.
- Anticipate and support City staff’s development of a community-wide Green Building Policy.

3. Energy Action Plans

- Support staff’s development and execution of the Community Energy Action Plans through continued assistance with data analysis, plan review, input and public outreach.
- Assist in development of a strategy for government operations that would ensure all municipal energy use (including schools) comes from renewable energy sources, through power purchase agreements, shared solar programs, or on-site installations.
- Develop outreach approaches to educate public and staff about newly available and enhanced federal incentives for efficiency and electrification.

4. Green Space

- Work with Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) and Planning department to explore options on goal-setting for green space.

5. Stormwater

- Work closely with Public Utilities Commission and UFC to ensure stormwater management code updates address the use of green infrastructure (including trees).
- Advocate for a stormwater management update in line with climate/stormwater flow predictions.

6. Consumption and Waste

- Support development of a new Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) for the City incorporating zero waste principles. ESC member Sarah Bayldon is the ESC appointee to the SWMP Advisory Committee, and ESC member Chris Behr is also a participant.

2023 Energy Transition Subcommittee (ETS) Goals

In early 2021, the Energy Transition Subcommittee (ETS) merged its monthly meetings with those of the full ESC. This reduced the workload on the staff liaison, and it allowed members of the ESC to participate in all ETS-related public-body discussions while attending only one meeting per month. This also made sense because ETS topics (building efficiency, low-carbon transportation, etc.) were becoming a larger share of ESC's focus areas. Therefore, as in CY2022, many goals of the full ESC overlap with those of the ETS and are discussed elsewhere in this report. Beyond those, the primary ETS-specific goals for CY2023 are:

- Supporting City staff’s successful completion of the Community and the Government Operation energy action plans. ETS members will be recruited to assist in public engagement efforts.
- Further exploring the concept of adding hands-on community service opportunities in ETS-topic areas. This idea was floated in late CY2022, but it has not yet generated

momentum. Unlike the other ESC subcommittees (ETG and HRTG), the ETS has not had (a) roles for in-the-field or in-school volunteers nor (b) corresponding City- or grant-funded sets of activities. Meanwhile, residents joining the ETS face FOIA restrictions on their discussions, which is a disincentive to officially joining the ETS.

2023 Habitat Restoration Task Group Goals

- **Spring and Fall 2023 HRT Public Volunteer Events:** HRTG will continue to schedule events, at least three in the Spring and three in the Fall. Eli Swadener, the new leader of the City's Urban Forestry Crew, will be supporting and assisting in these events.
- **Public Education:** Sandy Tarpinian and Amy Crumpton will arrange talks at the Mary Riley Styles Library on deterring deer and invasive plant identification for the home gardener. Sandy will offer composting workshops again in spring and fall. Sandy consulted with the organizers of the Falls Church Education Foundation regarding their Home and Garden Tour (April 16) and encouraged them to add residences that have installed rain gardens and use conservation landscaping techniques to address stormwater. HRTG will help get the word out on this event. HRT volunteers will continue to assist the students with the MHS Sustainability Program in their gardening and outdoor environmental education as requested and continue to develop the pollinator gardens at Oak Street Elementary.
- **Howard Herman Park Remediation:** The park is experiencing severe soil compaction and crown die-back on numerous trees. New signs have been installed asking public to stay on trails as the park is a Resource Protection Area. Amy is organizing a group of Master experienced volunteers to assist the Urban Forestry Crew during weekdays to set and mulch trails and plant trees and shrubs.

2023 Education Task Group Goals

Operation Earthwatch has seen a rejuvenation for the 2022-2023 school year, with increased volunteer support and student participation. For the coming year, the ETG would like to build on this year's successes:

- Continue to host monthly events at Mary Riley Styles Public Library, allowing participants the opportunity to complete activity sheets with peers
- Collaborate with Meridian Student Government Environmental Committee on activities and events; school gardens
- Secure school volunteer coordinators and at least two new program sponsors over the summer
- Identify creative efforts to increase program participation; target kindergarten class
- Apply for a Village Preservation and Preservation and Improvement Society grant to fund a user-friendly app to complete and submit activities online (reduce paper waste)