

Environmental Sustainability Committee 2013 Annual Report

February 18, 2014

Over the course of 2013 the Environmental Sustainability Committee (ESC) addressed several areas of concern, predominantly stormwater and recycling. The impact of stormwater on our streams, parks and the city's budget remains of utmost concern. Committee members continue to track the evolving regulatory scene and its potential ramifications. The ESC also researched ways to improve recycling in the city in response to a request from City Council. Other areas addressed by the committee during 2013 included review proposed developments, transportation projects, the water system transfer, and the parks and recreation strategic plan. The ESC continued its outreach efforts by participating in the city's annual parade, school programs, and with a booth at the Fall Festival.

Committee Status

The committee had eight members this year, welcoming one new member in 2013 and ending the year with one vacancy. Several citizens also informally help and advise the committee on a regular basis and during the 2012 -2013 school year we had a student representative. At the end of the 2013 the School Board offered to create a liaison member to the ESC on a trial basis, which School Board member Jon Buttram has agreed to fill. The committee looks forward to a closer working relationship with the School Board that will give the committee an opportunity to build on the school's successes in the district's goal to achieve its environmental and sustainability goal in both operational and curricular areas. During the fall of 2013 a George Mason University student volunteered with the ESC and supported several committee and city efforts, in particular the Fall Festival booth and recycling at the Fall Festival, the Lanier Middle School courtyard garden project, and research on urban tree policies. In addition, ESC members have attended PRAB meetings on a regular basis in an informal liaison capacity. The ESC met with the City Council for a work session in June 2013 to present our 2012 annual report, and recycling and stormwater reports.

Stormwater

Stormwater issues continue to be of great importance to the ESC in its efforts to help guide the city towards a more environmentally sustainable future. The city faces future problems with local flooding, significant erosion in the Accotink Creek, and the potential high costs of compliance with pending federal and Commonwealth stormwater regulations.

The committee believes the city staff has made commendable inroads in updating key aspects of the city's stormwater management processes in 2013, completing a new SM4 permit, implementing planning necessary to meet the Virginia Stormwater Management Program's July 1, 2014 deadlines, and revising the city stormwater and storm drainage facilities zoning ordinance. A very thorough RFP for future contractual stormwater compliance, engineering and general civil design consultant services has been circulated which will increase the city's capacity to deal with stormwater issues in 2014. Additionally, The City Council substantially strengthened the financial stability of the Stormwater Fund by increasing the supporting tax rate during the 2014 budget process.

The ESC has continued to monitor the city's implementation of stormwater management. The committee made detailed comments regarding the stormwater projects of the proposed 2014 Capital Improvement Planning budget. Also, it examined significant development projects for probable environmental impacts, and submitted comments related to stormwater concerns regarding both the proposed redevelopment of the Layton Hall Apartments and the Northfax drainage project.

On June 25, 2013 the ESC made an overview presentation to the Mayor and City Council during a work session. At the Council's request, the ESC followed up with a comprehensive written report on July 27, 2013. The complete report is available at the ESC web site, but the summary conclusions follow: "As a result of its review of city stormwater issues over the past three years the ESC has reached several conclusions regarding the demanding current and pending state and federal regulatory requirements:

- 1) The root of the city's stormwater problems lies in the many years of build-out in the city resulting in a vast increase in impervious surfaces and increased runoff.
- 2) The ESC commends the city for beginning the critical work of establishing a stormwater fund, funding staffing, and identifying policy needs to address upcoming regulations.
- 3) Moving forward, the city should focus on a more comprehensive and coordinated effort that will pull together the many government and private stormwater related activities, move policies and practices from a focus on stormwater drainage projects to improvements in stormwater management and track the cumulative effects of all public and private projects.
- 4) There is potential for remediation and for meeting requirements of the pending regulations by 1) increasing the use of Low Impact Development construction techniques, and 2) mobilizing residents and businesses in improving stormwater management on private properties.

The report contains a number of additional specific recommendations and can be accessed via the ESC web page www.fairfaxva.gov/esc.

The ESC will continue to monitor stormwater planning and management implementation, development and road projects with stormwater implications, city budget and funding actions that will affect or establish stormwater funding in future years, and make appropriate recommendations to the Mayor and City Council, and propose alternative it identifies to appropriate city staff. The ESC especially values the cooperation of staff on these issues.

Recycling

The ESC evaluated the City's recycling program at City Council's request. Current operations were analyzed, peer jurisdictions reviewed, and discussions were held with stakeholders. The ESC identified a series of low cost/high impact improvements. Recommendations spanned six key areas - commercial recycling, recycling at public events, parks and facilities, residential recycling, yard waste or 'green' recycling, and electronic recycling – and were submitted to City Council at the June Work Session. The ESC is proud of the City's accomplishments in 2013:

- **Recycling at city events.** Recycling containers debuted at the Fall Festival for the first time and are available to support future citywide events. Volunteers worked successfully throughout the day to oversee the proper use of the bins.
- **Recycling in the parks.** Progress has advanced to the planning stage. Parks and Recreation proposed line items in their FY15 capital budget to initiate recycling in heavily used parks.
- **Ongoing outreach expanded.** Since its inception, the ESC provided city neighborhood recycling coordinators with regular emails about recycling. In 2013 the city's Sustainability Coordinator enlarged this program and also recruited new neighborhood recycling coordinators.
- **Waste Management Plan.** City staff have prioritized its need and requested funding which the ESC fully supports. The ESC also sees a new plan as an opportunity for the City to redefine its waste management objectives. The ESC recommends building on the City's friendly and responsive service tradition in the development of its waste minimization and recycling goals.

The ESC will continue to advocate for enhancements to the recycling program in 2014. Low cost, high impact opportunities remain within reach. Enhancing the commercial recycling data collection process and tapping into commercial recycling data already collected by Fairfax County can be instituted immediately. Additional tactics like larger recycling bins, targeted outreach and incentives, such as waiving the once per week hauling requirement for businesses recycling more than the minimum, are more challenging but should be prioritized in the coming years. The ESC looks forward to assisting the City's Sustainability Coordinator and Public Works Staff wherever possible. The committee's full recommendations are outlined in our Recycling Program Evaluation posted at www.fairfaxva.gov/esc .

Outreach

The ESC has always taken its commitment to outreach seriously, and this year was no different. The committee sponsored the third annual Earth Art Show, assisted with the Commission on Fine Arts Earth Day Concert, took part in the 4th of July parade and ran a booth at the Fall festival.

This year the Art Show included over 80 pieces of artwork from all four of the city's public schools. With a grant from the Commission on Fine Arts we were able to award prizes to two students from each school, and with the support of American Bistro, held a reception in honor of the artists in our schools.

For the 4th of July parade, the ESC also coordinated with Lanier's Eco Club and Fairfax High School's Green Club to highlight the work our students are doing to learn about and protect our environment. Ted Britt Ford showcased an all-electric Ford Focus.

The Fall Festival was a great success with a well attended booth, handouts on stormwater and pollution concerns, rain barrel demo, recycling information and free reusable bags along with a commitment to reduce the use of single use plastic bags. The ESC also supported a local community group, Transition Fairfax VA, whose volunteers also helped staff the committee booth.

The ESC is pleased to have an updated and easily accessed location on the city's web site. Access via the web will play an increasingly important role in outreach efforts. The ESC also has a facebook page which was used to advertise our meetings and events related to the city's environmental sustainability.

Schools

The ESC is proud of the advances our schools have made, from integrating environmental education to early grade levels to establishing an Envirothon Team at the high school. The ESC supported the Lanier Middle School Vernal Pool project through publicizing and volunteering, and assisted in the establishment of a pilot program to compost food waste in the Daniels Run Elementary School cafeteria. In conjunction with the recent addition of a School Board liaison to the ESC, the ESC looks forward to playing a supporting role to further the education of our youth on such topical issues as stewardship of our environment, energy efficiency, and resource protection.

Water System Transfer

The ESC reviewed and commented on the transfer of water service from our city-owned and operated system to service purchased from Fairfax County Water Authority. The committee was divided over this difficult issue, with the majority concerned that the current water source, Goose Creek, is less impacted by existing and potential pollutants than the water sources used by Fairfax Water. However, it was also acknowledged that the cost of maintaining the current water system at this point in time is likely prohibitive and not viable in the long term. The decision to move forward without a referendum on the issue was also of concern to some members.

Development Review and Comment

The ESC reviewed and commented on the Layton Hall redevelopment plans in May 2013. Committee members remain concerned about the impact of the proposed redevelopment on the Accotink Creek. As a resource that finds its genesis in our city, the Accotink is one of our most serious environmental responsibilities. The ESC identified many concerns about how the proposed redevelopment would reduce the health of the stream by reducing its buffer, increasing the volume of water in the stream, drastically reduce the amount of pervious area on the site and the removal of almost all mature trees. A link to the ESC's letter to Council identifying these concerns can be found at www.fairfaxva.gov/esc.

Parks and Recreation Department Master Planning

The ESC participated in Phase I of the Parks and Recreation strategic plan process. The ESC has several areas of concern with regard to our parks. Many of the parks abut streams and thus play an important role in buffering and protecting our streams. Erosion, loss of vegetative areas, and impervious surface area are some of the most important factors to address if the city's streams are to continue to function adequately. Secondly, invasive plants have overtaken our natural areas and are threatening the viability of native plants and ecosystems. Third, the ESC sees the parks as optimal locations for awareness raising and education, much as was done at Daniels Run Elementary habitat restoration. A fourth area of concern is the protection of our large trees. Invasive plants are damaging many of our trees, and heavy

storms are taking their toll as well. The ESC recognizes that natural areas are dynamic and that part of the city's role as steward is to monitor conditions and plan ways to maintain a thriving tree population. Finally, the buildings that Parks and Recreation oversees are in some cases aging and the ESC strongly urges the implementation of energy conservation improvements and removal of hazardous building materials. The ESC looks forward to continuing to follow and contribute to the master planning process in 2014.

2014 Work Plan

The 2014 scope of work is a result of both ongoing and newly identified issues of concern. The ESC plans to support the following projects in 2014:

- Integrated, comprehensive approach to stormwater management
- City invasive plant management plan
- Alternative energy use in the city
- Homeowner education on issues of environment: stormwater, energy efficiency, invasive plants, use of bottled water, stream protection and low impact landscaping
- City tree protection plan
- Coordinated environmental initiatives throughout the city's schools
- Waste management and recycling

Conclusion

2013 was a busy and productive year for the ESC. The committee members remain steadfast in their determination to help the city improve its environmental sustainability. In its fourth year, the committee found that it has become better known throughout the community but recognizes the need to increase awareness among residents to ensure that the city can better identify and address issues of concern. The committee appreciates input from Mayor Silverthorne and City Council members, Planning Commission members, School Board members, and residents and welcomes all interested residents at our meetings. The members are cognizant that, despite the devotion of their time and energy, there is much more that could be done to create a more environmentally sound city beyond the capacity of the ESC. The committee has identified a broad array of issues to address in 2014, but find a common thread throughout is the need to develop better ways to inform and involve residents if we are to create a more sustainable city. We greatly appreciate the continued support of City Council members, residents, and staff as we all work together to improve the current and future sustainability of this unique and lovely city.

Summary of 2013 ESC Meetings

January 2013

2013 Work Plan; CIP discussion;

February 2013

Stormwater discussion re CIP funding and stormwater fund; finalize ESC 2013 work plan; CIP memo

March 2013

Recycling discussion per letter from Mayor and City Council; Earth day planning, spring clean up

April 2013

Earth Day Art Show, music event at Blenheim, discussion of sale of water system, recycling report finalized; vernal pool at Lanier

May 2013

Review of city projects Layton Hall and Northfax; Mosby Woods and Foxcroft flooding, stream restoration at Daniels Run Elementary School

June 2013

Parade and work session planning

July 2013

Parade participation with Lanier students, Britt Ford; work session with Mayor and City Council re recycling and stormwater

September 2013

Fall festival, legislative package; stormwater/zoning discussion

October 2013

Fall Festival; legislative package finalized

November 2013

School board liaison Jon Buttram joined the committee; transportation director Wendy Block Sanford met with ESC; solar energy real estate tax exemption discussion

December 2013

Joint meeting with ARB re zoning ordinance rewrite; annual report draft and development of 2014 work plan.

2013 reports and memos: All reports are posted www.fairfaxva.gov/esc

Date	Report/Memo
02/15/2013	Stormwater CIP Consideration of Stormwater Management in the Accotink Watershed
05/07/2013	Northfax Comments
05/08/2013	How to Improve Recycling in the City of Fairfax
05/10/2013	Proposed Redevelopment of Layton Hall
06/18/2013	Stormwater BMP Inspection Memo
06/25/2013	ESC Work Session Presentation
07/24/2013	Stormwater Report
10/21/2013	Legislative Package Proposals