

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.


PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Fairfax County
Program Title: Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives
Program Category: Communications (Public Relations)

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

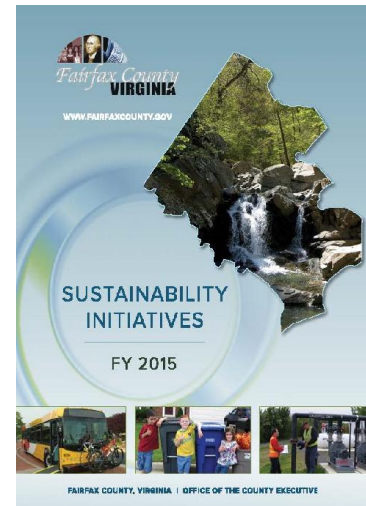
Name: David J. Molchany
Title: Deputy County Executive
Signature: 

FAIRFAX COUNTY GOVERNMENT

FAIRFAX COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

OVERVIEW

Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives is the product of a two-year interagency collaborative effort managed by the county's Environmental Coordinator and led by a Deputy County Executive.¹ It is a concise yet comprehensive reference guide that uses clear and simple language, as well as pictures and graphics, to showcase what Fairfax County is doing to promote sustainability and protect the environment.



Prior to the release of this guide, Fairfax County government lacked a single go-to summary describing the county's environmental stewardship and sustainability leadership, initiatives and successes. As a result, the extent of the county's commitments and the range of its activities were not well understood. Recognizing that an educational and informational tool would help address this challenge, Fairfax County undertook the task of developing a reader-friendly document that explains what Fairfax County and its partners are doing in support of the energy and environmental goals and policies of the Board of Supervisors. The resulting document, *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives*, was released on September 30, 2014.

¹ See *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives FY 2015* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/sustainability/.

Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives provides continuing and on-going educational and informational benefits. Periodic updates will provide the county with opportunities to introduce new topics to the public and to highlight initiatives or accomplishments not addressed in prior editions.

CHALLENGE

Ensuring a clean, sustainable environment is one of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors' priorities. As explained by the Board, this priority means that

Fairfax County will continue to protect our drinking water, air quality, stream valleys and tree canopy through responsible environmental regulations and practices. We will continue to take a lead in initiatives to address energy efficiency and sustainability and to preserve and protect open space for our residents to enjoy.²

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (Board) has a long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability. The Board has established the framework for the county's environmental initiatives through its vision, goals, policies and ordinances and has dedicated considerable resources to implementing these initiatives. Elements of that framework include the Board's Environmental Agenda, an award-winning 20-year vision first adopted in 2004 and revised in 2007, its Cool Counties Initiative adopted in 2007, the environmental protection, energy conservation and open space goals in the Policy Plan volume of the county's Comprehensive Plan, and the Environment Section of that Plan.³

² See *A Clean, Sustainable Environment* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board/priorities.

³ See *Board of Supervisors Environmental Agenda* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/eip/bos_environmental_agenda.pdf, *Cool Counties* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/coolcounties/ and *Policy Plan Element of the Comprehensive Plan* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/comprehensiveplan/policyplan/.

Individual departments, agencies and authorities have been essential to implementing the Board's strategic direction. Among other things, they have developed long-term plans that both address their responsibilities in a comprehensive and integrated manner and align with the Board's direction. Selected examples include the Solid Waste Management Plan, Watershed Management Plans for each of the county's 30 watersheds, and the Great Parks, Great Communities 2010-2020 Comprehensive Plan.⁴ Collaboration and cooperation among departments, agencies and authorities has been important, as well. The interagency Environmental Coordinating Committee was created in 1999 to ensure an appropriate level of coordination and review of the county's environmental policies and initiatives. In 2009, the interagency Energy Efficiency and Conservation Coordinating Committee was established to ensure coordination of energy efficiency and conservation across county agencies, schools and authorities and to share information and best practices. The county also works closely with its citizen advisory groups, including the Environmental Quality Advisory Council, which advises the Board on a variety of environmental matters, in part through preparation of an Annual Report on the Environment.⁵

County departments, agencies and authorities routinely issue news releases to highlight significant accomplishments, such as the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) certifications achieved by county government facilities built in compliance with the

⁴ See *Solid Waste Management Plan Update 2015-2035* and *Solid Waste Management Plan 2004-2025* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/swmp/, *Watersheds* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/watersheds/, *Great Parks, Great Communities* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/plandev/greatparks/.

⁵ See *Environmental Quality Advisory Council* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/eqac/.

county's green building policy.⁶ The county also routinely creates content on its Web pages to highlight the undertaking or completion of noteworthy initiatives, such as its water reuse project or its greenhouse gas emissions inventory.⁷ Nonetheless, Fairfax County government has historically lacked a concise and comprehensive document summarizing the county's environmental stewardship and sustainability initiatives and successes. In the absence of a single reference guide, residents and researchers alike generally developed only a partial understanding, typically pieced together from searches of the county's website. As a result, the extent of the county's commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability was not well understood and was frequently discounted.

EXECUTION

The *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* document was conceived in mid-2012. It took almost two years' effort by county staff and input from the majority of county departments, agencies and authorities to complete.

The Fairfax County Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), first developed in 2005, provides the county executive and Board with environmental and energy action-oriented opportunities to support Board-adopted environmental and energy policies and goals.⁸ The EIP

⁶ See *Fairfax County Sustainable Development Policy for Capital Projects* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/construction/sdpolicy.pdf. Information about the county's green buildings and their key features is available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/coolcounties/county_green_buildings.htm.

⁷ See *Water Reuse Project* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/wastewater/water_reuse/ and *Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/greenhousegas/greenhouse-gas-inventory.htm.

⁸ See *Environmental Improvement Program* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/eip/.

supplements opportunities and actions identified and funded by individual departments, agencies and authorities. By 2012, EIP program and project materials available on the EIP website were recognized as cumbersome and confusing to the public. Consequently, in July 2012 the county's Environmental Coordinator enlisted nearly a dozen staffers from different agencies to explore a revision of the EIP materials. The planned revision had two objectives: to make the materials more accessible to the public and to better publicize the county's efforts and accomplishments. The Environmental Coordinator subsequently assembled a core multi-agency team to undertake the task, which he managed under the leadership of a Deputy County Executive.

Initial meetings of the core team made clear that the two objectives would be best met by an entirely new document, rather than a revision of the existing EIP materials. Multiple meetings followed to identify and resolve the many threshold questions that accompany document creation. For example, at the outset the team agreed on the need for a concise and manageable document that would be accessible to the lay reader. To limit the document's length, the team needed to address issues including the topics to cover, the level of detail to provide, and how to respond to departments or agencies requesting more expansive discussions. To keep it accessible to the lay reader, the team needed to address issues including organization and structure, a target reading level, and the appropriate mix of text, pictures and graphics.

Numerous meetings were required to develop and hone the document's outline, which eventually served as the framework for the table of contents. By early 2013, the team had

reached consensus on the outline and members volunteered to serve as primary authors of the report's initial five sections. Most primary authors created teams to assist in drafting content. By May 2013, draft sections and subsections were forwarded to agency, department, and authority representatives for their review, comment and edits. Meanwhile, team members identified pictures and graphics, standardized formatting, and selected and confirmed URLs.

A first draft of the entire document, informally titled *EIP Strategic Plan*, was completed in August 2013 and circulated internally for review and comment. A second draft document, now named *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives*, was completed in December 2013 and circulated internally and to members of the county's Environmental Quality Advisory Council. A third draft was completed by March 2014. This version was circulated to prior internal reviewers as well Board staff. In both the transmittal and follow-up meetings, Board staff was asked to provide input on the following questions:

- Is this a useful tool and reference for you? How would you use this document?
- What portion(s) of this document would you be most likely to use?
- Are there any changes that you would suggest for future revisions of *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives*?
- Do you feel that this document is complete? Keeping in mind that the intent of the document is to provide an overview, are there any important program areas or developments that you think are missing? Are there any parts of this document that you feel are extraneous?
- Does this document meet the intended purpose and audience?

Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives was revised yet again to incorporate feedback from Board staff and other commenters. These revisions included the addition of an appendix listing telephone contact information for 11 different types of environmental concerns. A final revised version was provided in May 2014 to each member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and their staffs.

Over the next several months, a smaller team – still led by the Environmental Coordinator – focused on document layout and design, cover design, proofing and other issues related to publication and printing.

On September 30, 2014, *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* was presented to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors at its Environmental Committee meeting. During that meeting, Committee Chair and Board Vice Chairman Penny Gross stated:

For too long, Fairfax County has not received the credit it deserves in environmental and energy sustainability and leadership. One reason may be the fact that while the county commits a substantial amount of resources each year and has done a great job in the planning and execution of its efforts, we have not always taken the time to carefully document our success. For this reason, I'm pleased to present the county's first publication of Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives (FCSI). This document is intended for an audience interested in learning about what Fairfax County and its partners are doing in support of the Energy and Environmental goals and policies of the Board of Supervisors. It showcases what the county is doing to promote sustainability and protect the environment in a single go-to document, which is a first of its kind.⁹

⁹ See *2014 Board Committee Meetings*, Environmental Committee (September 30, 2014) at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/board-committees/meetings/2014/archive.htm. A copy of the meeting summary is not available on-line but may be obtained from the Clerk to the Board of Supervisors. Requests may be made by email (ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov), by telephone (703-

Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives was posted to its own page on the county website later that day, replacing an interim sustainability Web page.¹⁰

County staff is currently reviewing and updating *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* and plans to release a Fiscal Year 2016 version in September 2015.

STAFFING AND COST

Staffing: *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* is the product of a two-year interagency collaborative effort managed by the county's Environmental Coordinator and led by a Deputy County Executive. Numerous departments, agencies and authorities were essential to the undertaking, as were staffs of the Office of the County Executive and the Board members. The report's introduction recognizes 10 staff members in particular. The eight departments, agencies and authorities associated with these staff members reveals the extent of this project's collaboration and cooperation: Department of Cable and Consumer Services, Department of Information Technology, Department of Planning and Zoning, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, Department of Purchasing and Supply Management, Office of Public Affairs, Fairfax County Park Authority and Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District.

324-3151 or TTY at 703-324-3903), or by mail. Additional information about the Clerk's Office, including a mailing address, is available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/.

¹⁰ See *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives FY 2015* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/sustainability/. The document is also featured on the county's *Environment and Energy* landing page at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/environment/.

Cost: Fairfax County spent \$2,895 on the design, layout, production, review and delivery of print-ready and web-ready versions, as well as the printing of 50 copies of *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives*. This cost was paid by the Department of Information Technology (DIT). All other work associated with the document, including creation of the *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* Web page, was performed by staff in the course of their regular responsibilities.

RESULTS

The release of *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* received an enthusiastic response. As noted, Board of Supervisors Vice Chairman Penny Gross, who announced the release at the September 30, 2014 meeting of the Board’s Environmental Committee, praised the document for showcasing “what the county is doing to promote sustainability and protect the environment in a single go-to document, which is a first of its kind.” The initial print run of 50 copies, which was planned primarily for distribution to members of the Board of Supervisors and their staffs, was quickly exhausted, with requests for more copies. The release was noted on various blogs and websites, including the websites of the Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia.¹¹ Public comment was and has been overwhelming supportive.

Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives provides numerous benefits to the county, its residents and businesses and organizations located within the county, as well as the broader public. The

¹¹ See Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce *Environmental Issues* (October 2014) at www.dullesregionalchamber.org/pages/EnvironmentallIssues and Audubon Society of Northern Virginia *Fairfax Sustainability* at www.audubonva.org/index.php/local-advocacy-items/419-fairfax-sustainability.

primary benefits are educational and informational, as a high-level overview of the county's leadership, initiatives and successes in the areas of environmental stewardship and sustainability necessarily requires discussion of a broad range of topics. For example, in the space of 40 pages, Section 3, *Promoting a Sustainable Community*, addresses growth and land use, air quality and transportation, water resources, parks and ecological resource management, trees and tree conservation, solid waste management, community outreach, education and stewardship, environmental health, and noise, light and visual pollution. Section 4, *Promoting Sustainable County Operations*, addresses green building design and construction, green purchasing and supply management, energy efficiency initiatives undertaken by the Departments of Facilities Management and Information Technology, waste management initiatives including landfill gas recovery and re-use and water re-use, the county's hybrid and electric vehicle fleet, activities of the Fairfax Employees for Environmental Excellence, and the results of a county-wide greenhouse gas emissions inventory (2006 baseline). Readers interested in learning more about virtually any of the topics addressed in *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* can follow links to county Web pages for additional information. This document has already proven to be a resource for residents, researchers, county staff and regional entities including the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

The benefits of *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* are on-going because it has been conceived as a living document that will be updated on a periodic basis. Each update will provide the county with opportunities to introduce new topics and to highlight initiatives or accomplishments not addressed in the prior edition. For example, on March 24, 2015 – six months after release of *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* – the Department of Public

Works and Environmental Services issued a news release announcing that its Brookfield Park wet pond rehabilitation project was awarded second place in the category of Best Habitat Creation in the *2014 Best Urban BMP in the Bay* contest sponsored by the Chesapeake Stormwater Network.¹² Many residents may know little, if any, about the county's stewardship of existing pond wildlife. Including a short description of this rehabilitation project in the FY 2016 version of *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* will publicize the effort while also serving to introduce the broader topic of stormwater management to some readers. The staff resources and expense associated with each update are not expected to be significant, as the foundational elements of the document, including structure and design, are already in place and need not be recreated.

CRITERIA FULFILLMENT

Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives satisfies two of the Achievement Awards' criteria for selection: the reference guide offers an innovation solution to a problem, situation or delivery of services and both the document and the process of its development provide a model that other local governments may learn from or implement in their own localities.

As noted above, Fairfax County government has historically lacked a concise and comprehensive document summarizing the county's environmental stewardship and sustainability initiatives and successes. In the absence of a single reference guide, residents and researchers alike generally developed only a partial understanding, typically pieced

¹² See *Fairfax County Project Wins Prestigious Award* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/news/fairfax-county-project-wins-award.htm and *Fairfax County Awards* (March 2015) at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/opa/awards/.

together from searches of the county's website. As a result, the extent of the county's commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability was not well understood and was frequently discounted. *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* was developed to serve as that single reference guide – an apparent first for any Virginia locality. It uses clear and simple language, as well as pictures and graphics, to provide an overview of the county's wide-ranging environmental stewardship and sustainability objectives and activities. To limit its length and retain reader interest, policies, programs and projects are briefly described and links to county Web pages provided for those interested in a more in-depth discussion. Posting on the county's website ensures that it can be readily found and accessed. While *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* serves primarily to educate and inform, it also may encourage some readers to "take up the challenge and work with [Fairfax County] to further develop the county's sustainability initiatives."

The collaborative, interagency approach used by Fairfax County to develop *Fairfax County Sustainability Initiatives* is a model that other local governments can implement in their own jurisdictions. The approach is already familiar, as localities frequently pursue collaboration and cooperation in order to achieve defined objectives and goals. As Fairfax County has demonstrated, this approach also can be applied to achieve complex communications objectives.