

**City of Falls Church
Environmental Sustainability Council
July 19th, 2021 City Council Work Session**

Introductions

- Good evening, and thanks for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Environmental Sustainability Council
- My name is Andy Young and I serve as the chair, with Stacey Evers serving as Vice Chair
- Nine members and three high school participants
- Kate Walker, the City's Enviro Programs Coordinator, serves as our staff liaison
- Excited to have Cory Weiss as our Planning Commission liaison and Debbie Hiscott as our City Council Liaison

Set-Up

- We came to talk with you all in April about the need for the City of Falls Church to do more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and highlighted three areas the City should focus on to make progress:
 - Lead by example with energy efficiency;
 - Increase use of multi-modal transit solutions; and
 - Prepare for electric vehicles
- We were asked a couple weeks ago to put together some thoughts on how to make additional progress in each of these areas, and we're here tonight to present some recommendations around:
 - Policy actions;
 - Short term activities (things we can do now); and
 - FY23 priorities
- So tonight we'll take a few minutes to do just that; we can provide a follow up summary if helpful

#1 Lead by example on energy efficiency

- To give the City a goal to strive for, one concept we'd like to propose is to **become carbon neutral** from a city operations standpoint. When it comes to facilities and real estate, this can be achieved through a combination of **energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy use**. The new high school is a great example of incorporating both of these.
- Just last week Fairfax County announced their commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2040, Arlington and Alexandria have similar goals – we should follow suit!

- **Policy Action:** Set a **carbon-neutral energy target** for all city facilities (municipal and schools) **AND** make achieving this goal a focal point of future Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) discussions.
 - Noted the **equity review** incorporated into the latest CIP; we think a carbon-neutral focus could be handled in a similar fashion
 - From the latest CIP report, it's noted that the City of Falls Church owns almost 800k sf of property, between the City and the schools
 - Meridian High School was a significant accomplishment, and at 290k sf, represents 38% of the real estate inventory of the city – what's our plan to address the rest?
 - Looking at the current CIP, how much could we lean in to the Oak St Elementary investment slated for FY27, for example?
 - We need a plan, and setting a carbon-neutral energy target, along with a focus in the CIP process, can set us up for success.
- **Things to Do Now:** consider opportunities to use the \$18M in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to address some of the energy retrofit needs of our building inventory
 - Understand there are a lot of competing priorities, and a lot of stipulations on how the funds can be used
 - Several items on the listed being circulated can potentially offer significant sustainability improvements – HVAC upgrades, contactless plumbing fixtures
 - Broader interpretation of facility reinvestment could open up other possibilities
- **FY23:** Ensure City staff is resourced to explore and execute alternative financing needs for sustainability improvements.
 - Continue discussions on the use of Energy Savings Performance Contracts (ESPCs) for making needed upgrades to our major facilities; ESPCs are a form of financing that uses reduced energy costs to pay back upfront investments
 - Kudos on the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for renewable energy at Meridian High School that's getting installed this summer
 - Where can we do it again?
 - There are challenges of scale – it will take collaboration with the schools, who have the bigger real estate portfolio, to identify viable opportunities; and these kinds of projects do take staff resources to execute – procurement and project management are really important
 - Never enough money to keep up with all the facility investment needs, even for a small jurisdiction like the City of Falls Church. But there are ways to leverage outside resources to work on energy efficiency and greenhouse gas reductions as a priority – we just need to make sure we've got the staff bandwidth and expertise to manage it.
- We recognize that the city building inventory only represents a sliver of Falls Church overall, but it's a great place to start – leading by example

#2 - Increase use of multi-modal transportation solutions:

- As you heard from us in April, 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.
- **Policy Actions:** Request Staff to conduct a **review of the City's minimum parking requirements** and evaluate the possibility of reducing or eliminating them entirely.
 - Many other jurisdictions across the country have taken this step
 - With the City's increased density, access to metro, and improved walk-and-bike-ability, do the historical parking requirements still make sense? We think it's worth consideration.
- **Things to Do Now:** Two items to mention:
 - Consider using ARPA funds to offer **transportation subsidies to employees of Falls Church based businesses** who could use public transportation options to get to work.
 - Fits well into the category of stimulating business recovery
 - Might be helpful to those businesses who are having difficulty hiring employees
 - Cuts down on cars on roads in the city
 - Support the incorporation of **protected bike lanes into the Great Streets project for Park Ave.**
 - You've heard from us before on the importance of bike lanes in Falls Church
 - The ESC was excited to see and is supportive of the Citizens Advisory Council on Transportation (CACT) recommendations for protected bike lanes submitted to the City Council in June
 - Got a chance to hear from Alvaro Astorga on City Staff last Thursday about the Great Streets project, and was excited to learn that protected bike lanes are a possibility
 - **To help generate awareness and interest, ESC is working with Staff and the CACT on a protected bike lane demonstration project to be held on a Saturday in October – hope to have more to share soon**
- **FY23:** Map out and resource a plan to create safe bike paths that connect Meridian HS and MEH MS to the rest of the City.
 - Enormous opportunity for our kids to get to/from school more easily
 - Connect dense areas of the city which will reduce congestion and make our businesses accessible by more customers

#3 - Prepare for electric vehicles (EVs)

- As we talked about back in April, and I am sure you all are seeing, the future of transportation is electric, and after years of anticipation, the transition is upon us.
- Excited by the recent news about purchasing EVs for the city fleet!
- **Policy Actions:** Set a zero emissions target for the municipal vehicle fleet prioritize fleet and work management for minimization of vehicle use, and then prioritize electric vehicle purchases for all replacements.
- **Things to Do Now:** Incorporate ESC recommendations on more expansive EV charging infrastructure for future Special Exception requests – provided back in June
 - 5% of all parking spaces
 - Plans for future expansion
- **FY23:** Fund additional communications staff to support outreach and education efforts on sustainability topics, including electric vehicles, but also many others.
 - ESC has talked a lot about the need for more outreach and communication recently
 - Very excited to see the *Focus on Falls Church* article from two weeks ago on the Environment for Everyone Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan – Clare Casey from City Staff did a really great job highlighting recent world climate events as motivation for what we can in our 2 square miles to add to contribute to the overall climate change improvement process
 - There are a lot of little things citizens can be doing to have a positive impact on the climate – we need to expand the conversation in the city, and additional communications/outreach resources would make a big difference

Conclusion

- Appreciate the opportunity to speak with you all this evening
- We are faced with a long-term, global challenge – we need to be thinking about ambitious long, term goals for how our little 2 square mile city can do its part to make the world a more sustainable place for us all to live
- We hope our suggestions on policy actions, things we can do now, and FY23 priorities provide tangible steps you all feel the city can take for a more sustainable future for everyone
- Time permitting – happy to take any questions you might have