

## Statement to Fairfax County Environmental Quality Advisory Council

Betsy Martin, Friends of Little Hunting Creek and Northern Virginia Trash Action Work Force<sup>1</sup>

January 10, 2018

In Fairfax County's new environmental vision, solid waste management is one of seven areas identified by the Board of Supervisors as priorities.

Yet, EQAC's most recent report offers only three recommendations on solid waste management (on improving recycling, illegal dumping, and a statewide container redemption fee).

"Litter" is mentioned once in the report. I'm glad EQAC continues "to recommend a statewide container redemption fee to reduce litter and increase the recovery of containers in a form that can be recycled." However, you demur, writing "This recommendation requires action at the General Assembly and cannot be addressed by County staff."

Please recommend actions the County can take on litter, not just actions it cannot.

The need for action is great. The Friends of Little Hunting Creek and Senator Scott Surovell have conducted annual cleanups of the creek since 2002, as part of the Potomac Watershed Cleanup sponsored by Alice Ferguson Foundation. Since the Friends started keeping records in 2006, volunteers have picked up 3,343 bags of trash and recyclables, 258 tires, 177 shopping carts, and tons of additional bulk trash. On average, this is about 257 bags, 20 tires, and 14 shopping carts per cleanup. These figures do not include cleanups conducted by others, for example, the Boy Scouts annually pick up trash just downstream of the Route 1 bridge (60 bags this year, according to newspaper reports).

Little Hunting Creek is but one of the tributaries that discharge Fairfax County's litter into the Potomac River. The trash we retrieve from the creek (and we never get it all) is an indication of the trashiness of Fairfax County and its streams. The level of trash is unacceptable and degrades

---

<sup>1</sup> The Northern Virginia Trash Action Work Force (NOVATAWF) was formed by groups concerned about reducing trash and litter in Northern Virginia, including Friends of Little Hunting Creek, Friends of Accotink Creek, Friends of Lake Accotink Park, Friends of Dyke Marsh, Friends of Huntley Meadows, Sierra Club (Mount Vernon and Great Falls Chapters), Alice Ferguson Foundation, Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment, Clean Water Action, Potomac Riverkeepers, Four Mile Run Conservancy, and 350Fairfax.

our neighborhoods, streams, the Potomac River, and the Chesapeake Bay. It depresses property values and undermines the County's plans to revitalize depressed areas, such as Richmond Highway. With the stellar exception of the workers of the Solid Waste Management Division, who for 15 years have promptly and ably collected all the trash Friends of Little Hunting Creek clean up, the County has made little effort to address the litter problem.

In 2011, the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Associations adopted a *Citizens' Action Plan for Litter Prevention* suggesting steps the county could take to prevent litter (<http://www.mvcca.org/resolution-tracker-details?ResID=112>), and passed another resolution in 2013 (<http://www.mvcca.org/Resolutions/ltr-E&R-2013-02.pdf>). In 2013, I testified at the EQAC annual hearing, asking for help on litter. I remember Chairman Koch saying, "We hear you, Betsy."

But I think not. Four years later, the word "litter" appears just once in your report. Our concerns and requests have not been answered.

What does it take to get you to act on litter? EQAC wields power that could motivate the County to take basic steps toward litter prevention.

We offer ten actions the county could take now, that do not require permission from the General Assembly.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Fairfax County should walk the walk...

1. Prohibit buying or distributing single-use water bottles at all county events and functions.
2. Make reusable water bottles available (sell or give away) to employees/participants.
3. Install at least one water refill station (or retrofit drinking fountains to refill water bottles) in every county facility, including government centers, recreation facilities, and schools.
4. No longer sell single use plastic water bottles in vending machines/cafeterias in county facilities.
5. Ban plastic straws in county-run cafeterias/restaurants.

6. Post more signs on and near county property urging people to recycle; provide more recycling bins.

Recycle more, enforce more, and work on teaching good habits and attitudes in schools and businesses.

7. Revise the litter control ordinance to require all businesses to recycle cans and bottles, in addition to paper and cardboard. Revise the waste management ordinance to prohibit materials for collection being placed outside of dumpsters, where they become litter all too quickly.

8. Target critical areas (such as Richmond Highway corridor, which generates so much litter, and Resource Protection Areas, which receive it) for active enforcement of laws intended to reduce litter.

9. Evaluate the effectiveness of recycling programs in the public schools, and of stewardship education.

Test and adopt new litter removal strategies.

10. Speed up the implementation of trash traps in streams (or other engineering solutions to removing litter and trash) and evaluate their effectiveness.