

# Joint Comments from Fairfax Healthy Communities Network on the Community-wide Energy & Climate Action Plan (CECAP)

*September 3, 2021*

AUDUBON NATURALIST SOCIETY • COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH • FRIENDS OF HOLMES RUN • NORTHERN VIRGINIA AFFORDABLE HOUSING ALLIANCE • SIERRA CLUB  
GREAT FALLS GROUP • SOUTH COUNTY TASK FORCE • VIRGINIA LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS • WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

Dear Chairman McKay & and Members of the Board of Supervisors,

The above named organizations, as part of the **Fairfax Healthy Communities Network**, are excited to support the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP). As Virginia's most populous jurisdiction, Fairfax County can stand out as a leader in the region and have an outsized impact on the race to reduce carbon emissions.

Our network partners envision a Fairfax County where people can live, work, and play in connected communities that are healthy, sustainable and inclusive. In fact, there may be no policy endeavor that better embodies our joint work than a climate plan that addresses all aspects of providing clean air, clean energy, reducing reliance on dirty fossil fuels for transportation, and ensuring natural green space for all county residents. This is a large part of our vision for a healthy community.

The newly-released Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sixth Assessment Report<sup>1</sup> on the science of climate change provides a dire picture of accelerated impacts. Warming of the planet is happening at an alarming rate, far faster than predicted.

The report predicts that warming of greater than 1.5 C (2.7F) will cause more extreme weather events such as fires, droughts and flooding. These events are already happening. Hurricane Ida, the Caldor Fire, the extreme heat in the Pacific Northwest and even our local intense pattern of rain are all very real "canaries in the coal mine" for all policy makers.

Today, we do not feel the most severe and dangerous impacts here in Fairfax County. However, the current fires and storms serve as the newest wakeup call - we have the opportunity to try to get ahead of the most severe local impacts. Fairfax County is a significant contributor to the emissions problem in the metro area and shares the responsibility to solve it. Only by large and rapid cuts in emissions can these dire impacts be addressed. There is no time to waste, and every jurisdiction has to play a role.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>

Core to this plan are twelve strategies that outline areas of focus. Each is important, but some will have greater mitigation impacts, such as energy efficiency in buildings and changes in transportation, particularly vehicular impacts. Others come with multiple benefits, such as preserving and expanding our natural resources throughout various land use processes to both sequester carbon and provide additional climate resiliency. Given the complexity of climate change and the world's evolving response, we cannot rely on residents and businesses to voluntarily change behaviors or know which climate-friendly steps are most beneficial to prioritize, so we count on innovative and ambitious government policies and actions to influence change.

Reaching the goals in CECAP will only be possible if the County moves from ideation to the implementation phase at full speed. An implementation plan must be crafted and put in place with the urgency that is needed. As with all County programs, it is critical that each facet of this program comply with the One Fairfax policy by asking who benefits, who is harmed by any actions, and how we prevent harm.

As advocates representing environmental, smart growth, transportation, affordable housing, and social justice, organizations, we urge the Board of Supervisors to:

1. Develop an aggressive timeline for the CECAP Implementation Plan
2. Hire a team of climate experts to guide and support staff in implementing the plan
3. Fund programs and provide incentives in FY 2023 to begin immediately mitigating carbon emissions

We are counting on the Board to offer its considerable leadership to this formidable task. If it is to be successful, it will also require dedicated, creative, and visionary staff to permeate throughout the government and into the private sector. Success is the only option.

Thank you for taking this important next step in the climate fight.

Sincerely,

**Audubon Naturalist Society**, Renee Grebe, Northern Virginia Conservation Advocate  
**Coalition for Smarter Growth**, Sonya Breehey, Northern Virginia Advocacy Manager  
**Friends of Holmes Run**, Whitney Redding, Primary Conservator  
**Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance**, Michelle Krockner, Executive Director  
**Sierra Club, Great Falls Group**, Ann Bennett, Energy, Climate and Land Use  
**South County Task Force**, Mary Paden, Chair  
**Virginia League of Conservation Voters**, Bridget McGregor, Senior Northern Virginia Organizer  
**Washington Area Bicyclist Association**, Stephanie Piperno, Trails Coalition Manager