



Norfolk Environmental Commission Annual Report 01 July 2020 through 30 June 2021

Message from the Chair

Although COVID made communication difficult and less effective, the Norfolk Environmental Commission (NEC) soldiered on through fiscal year 2021. We continued our monthly Executive Committee and full NEC meetings using WebEx as our primary tool. We received online presentations from ten leaders of area environmental related initiatives ranging from Norfolk's freshwater reservoir systems to regional offshore Wind Power development. The NEC prepared to restart the Green Reader program where Commissioners, public figures, First Responders, and interested citizens read age-appropriate environmental books to 1st and 3rd grade Norfolk students. We hope to reenter the schools in Spring 2022.

The Commission developed and executed an online survey for Norfolk City residents to seek their input/wisdom to test the effectiveness of our communication campaigns. We are in the process of adjusting and focusing our priorities. Commissioners visited several Norfolk stormwater projects and learned firsthand the scope and impact these programs have on citizens. We conducted litter clean up campaigns and talked with residents about the best approach to get neighbors involved. We planted trees and maned car drop off litter/hazardous waste and recycle stations. We prepared a program to dramatically reduce the use of single use plastic bags.

During the last fiscal year, we have sought to understand and leverage the many organizations (not for profit, governmental, citizen action groups, businesses, and individual volunteers) that are working in concert with us to improve our environment. We thank all those who have invested time, energy, and money to make our city and future even brighter.

Stephen Leaman
Chair, Norfolk Environmental Commission

The Norfolk Environmental Commission (NEC) is a 22-member, City Council-appointed group of Norfolk volunteer citizens. The Commission acts in an advisory capacity to the Director of Public Works. All Commissioners are expected to attend and participate in regular meetings and offer to take on special assignments related to environmental issues and special events. The NEC meets at 5:30 pm on the third Tuesday of each month at the Ernie Morgan Environmental Action Center (3500-A Granby Street). Meetings are open to the public.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NEC held meetings by electronic communication means pursuant to Virginia Code § 2.2-3708.2(A)(3). The City of Norfolk declared a Local State of Emergency pursuant to Virginia Code § 44-146.21 due to the public health danger of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, which constitutes a disaster and emergency. The catastrophic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic made it impracticable or unsafe for the NEC to assemble a quorum in a single location. Due to lack of meeting space large enough to accommodate the Commission, monthly meetings were conducted through WebEx phone and videoconferencing. Public notice for each meeting continued to be given. The public was allowed access through the WebEx phone and through video links provided on the City of Norfolk's website. The public was able to continue participating in NEC activities throughout this time.

Mission

The mission of the NEC is to lead Norfolk residents toward environmental stewardship. We empower the citizens of Norfolk with a sense of pride and individual environmental stewardship involving land, air, and water quality issues. Our focus is on monitoring and researching current environmental issues, fostering awareness, developing and promoting effective strategies, and encouraging communication among city, regional, and state governments and agencies.

Commissioner Roles

The 22-member commission includes representatives from citizen interest, business and industry, local professions, communications, schools, armed forces, and community organizations. Non-voting ex-officio members are appointed from Norfolk's municipal operations staff. Ex-officio members include representatives or designees of the director of public works, the superintendent of waste management, the director of public health, the environmental services manager, and the stormwater engineer. The Commission's executive committee is comprised of a member elected chair, two vice-chairs, a secretary, and two members-at-large. NEC roles are as follows:

- ***Chair:*** supports and motivates the board and committees, represents the NEC to the community and helps direct day-to-day decisions of the Commission. (See Bylaws, Article VII, Section 7.1 for specific duties.)
- ***Vice-Chair (2):*** works directly with committees as ex-officio members and serves in the absence of the chairman to perform the same duties; help direct the day-to-day decisions of the Commission.
- ***Secretary:*** ensures that Executive Committee and Regular Meeting minutes are recorded and distributed, attendance and hours records are maintained, and contact lists are updated as needed.
- ***Members-at-Large (2):*** represent the members of the NEC on the executive committee; work directly with committees as ex-officio members; help direct the day-to-day decisions of the Commission.
- ***Commissioner:*** leads or participates in one or more committees of the NEC; attends monthly NEC meetings; votes on matters of the Commission; interacts with the community in support of NEC programs, projects, and goals.

- **Associate Member:** a non-voting Commission member who attends regular meetings of the NEC and can serve on committees in support NEC programs and projects; associate members may be recruited by voting Commissioners and approved by the Executive Committee. Associate members generally fall into two categories: previous commissioners who have reached city code term limits or who do not wish to be reappointed but wish to continue sharing their experience and expertise; or citizens who think they may want to join the commission either during a time when there are no vacancies or giving them the time to better understand what serving involves to determine if they would like to apply to full commission membership.
- **Ex-officio Member:** City of Norfolk staff member who provides information to the NEC in their area of expertise and the operations of their department or division; solicits and utilizes as appropriate the opinions, suggestions, and recommendations of the NEC.

FY2021 Executive Committee

Chair: Stephen Leaman

Vice-Chair: Rooney Rosmer

Vice Chair: Cindy Shurling

Secretary: Kari Buchanan

Member-at-large: Roberto Lovick

Member-at-large: Andrew Haas

Work Group Reports

- 1) **BOARD GOVERNANCE:** assist the Executive Committee and working committees; work to ensure proper functioning and overall effectiveness of the NEC.
 - a. Conducted an internal commissioner survey in fall 2020 to assess priorities and alignment of our members and inform the strategic planning process for the NEC.
 - b. In early 2021, began reorganizing work groups and initiatives to reflect the results of the internal strategic priorities assessment. Provided commissioners and associates the opportunity to volunteer for groups and committees of their choice.
 - c. Conducted a demographic analysis of current commissioners and associates to help align the NEC’s goal to build a diverse membership that reflects Norfolk’s population. Recommended applicants who met this goal. Asked and received City Council approval to leave three vacancies as the NEC conducts recruitment targeting more diverse applicants.
 - d. Conducted commissioner orientation for three new commissioners and two associate members in fall 2020. Also attending was Vice Mayor Martin Thomas Jr. and city presenters.
 - e. Conducted a community survey to assess environmental priorities and identify priority initiatives for FY22.
- 2) **COMMUNICATIONS:** leads the effort to support relationship building in the community through effective communication of NEC goals and programs. Workgroup activities include printed materials and reports; digital outreach (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram); and administration of the environmental awards and recognition program.
 - a. Supported general NEC activities throughout the fiscal year.

- 3) **LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL POLICY ADVOCACY:** follow the legislative process at the

regional, state, and local level to track environmental issues important to the city; serve as a catalyst to city council for action on important matters affecting the local environment.

- a. Provided legislative priorities to City Council to help inform the city’s policy setting process.
- b. Developed letters of support or opposition on behalf of the NEC for City Council review stating NEC positions on key environmental policy decisions.

4) ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: supports programing and citizen education to address environmental issues throughout Norfolk such as water quality, sustainable shorelines, environmental cleanup, and natural area protection.

- a. Sustainable Shorelines
 - i. Sustainable Workshops are given to provide the citizens about the protection, benefits, and restoration of shorelines. These workshops have been on hiatus for two years due to the pandemic. The work group will coordinate with Seamus McCarthy to plan the next workshop.
- b. Underground Storage Tanks
 - i. The city is continuing to work to reduce the number of these tanks. No updates to report for FY21.
- c. Watershed Signage
 - i. Based on work with the many departments of the city, signs have been installed. The work group will continue to coordinate with the city to determine if more signs, that have been under production, are still needed.
- d. Native Wildlife and Fauna
 - i. The work group, in coordination with Norfolk Master Gardeners, are involved in the maintenance of Weyanoke Sanctuary.
 - ii. Work group members participated in three tree adoption events.
- e. Reclaimed Recreational areas
 - i. This is a new initiative for the work group. Goals and objectives will be coordinated with the NEC for FY22.

5) SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES: supports NEC activities to tackle environmental challenges throughout Norfolk such as urban development, energy use/infrastructure, flooding, tree canopy expansion, single use plastics/plastic bags, waterway litter/pollution, and water quality.

6) YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: lead programs to guide elementary and middle school children of Norfolk toward proactive environmental stewardship.

- a. Plastic Bag Recycling in Schools: ongoing program since 2014.
 - i. Due to COVID, no activities to report during this reporting period.
- b. Green Reader Program: for two weeks each November, volunteers read selected environmental books to Kindergarten and Third Grade classrooms. Typically enlist 50 to 60 volunteers from the NEC, citizens, police and fire personnel, City Council, Norfolk Master Gardeners, and high school students.
 - i. Served 9 schools and read to more than 1,200 children in FY21.
 - ii. Secured funding from the Norfolk Wetlands Board to purchase copies of books to give each child volunteers read to.

c. High School Representatives: In March each year, the NEC invites Norfolk Public School

students to apply for the Student Representative Program. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors are invited to submit applications. The term lasts the school year.

- i. Due to COVID, no High School representative selected during this reporting period.

Future NEC Initiatives

- 1) Continue current programs, task force work, and community outreach.
- 2) Continue program alignment with Norfolk’s Green Infrastructure Plan, Resilience Strategy, and the Mayor’s Commission on Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation. Programming focus on Environmental Sustainability and Lifelong Learning.
- 3) Youth Engagement and Education task force for Plastic Bag Recycling in Schools will continue to expand the program’s success to include more schools; work to lead the schools towards a 100% recycling target.
- 4) Youth Engagement and Education task force for Green Reader plans to expand program support to reach more schools and students.
- 5) Environmental Protection and Sustainable Practices work groups to develop annual goals in coordination with community needs.
- 6) Communications and Community Outreach committee developing new outreach materials to better support public engagement opportunities.
- 7) Commission goals for extended outreach to better understand community needs with a target of improved equity and inclusion and expand commission diversity.