

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT


Hello Friends!

As we near the end of 2023, we are excited to update you on what we've been up to! But first, a little refresher about who we are: Clean Fairfax Council began as a litter control task force in 1978, and became a 501c3 nonprofit in 1985. Today, we still operate as a private nonprofit, and though we work closely with different arms of the Fairfax County Government, we are not a funded county agency. Thus, we rely on funding from competitive and non-competitive grants, revenue from the state litter tax, corporate sponsorships and gifts, and individual donations in order to fulfill our mission of encouraging environmental stewardship and urban sustainability in Fairfax County.

Over the last year, we continued to work at cleaning up Fairfax County by supporting community litter education and cleanups, consulting and collaborating with the County on programs to further address the litter problem, and fighting for a cleaner and greener Fairfax and Virginia through our environmental advocacy efforts.

One of the core pillars of our work at Clean Fairfax will always be to support community members, groups, schools, and businesses in actively engaging with their environment. Despite the continuing challenges presented by Covid-19 and the near-constant changes and developments to our growing (sub)urban community, we are proud to have supported **98 community cleanups** in 2023. These cleanups activated over 2,000 Fairfax County residents, students, scout troops, neighborhood and HOA members, and corporate employees, who hauled in over **66 tons of litter** and clocked over **5,100 volunteer hours**, saving taxpayers an estimated **\$162,418.00** in cost to clean up our community. This data doesn't even count the many "Friends of" groups regularly cleaning up Fairfax County Parks and playing fields, nor the impressive work of our colleagues at Operation Stream Shield who clean up areas across the County 5 days/week. While we will always be proud of the work we do, we will continue to promote **proactive efforts** of reducing plastic, polystyrene and other materials in our everyday lives, before they BECOME litter that then needs to be picked up by county agencies, residents, students, taxpayers, and businesses.

Clean Fairfax continues its mutually beneficial partnership with the County's Stormwater Management team through Clean Streams—a stream monitoring and reporting program that helps the County fulfill MS4 Permit requirements and helps us capture and share important trends in litter across the area. The past 8 years of this partnership have provided us with robust and invaluable data on what types of litter dominate Fairfax County streams, where litter comes from, where it goes, and what actions we as individuals, communities, and a County must take to effectively *Turn Off the Tap* of plastic pollution. Some of these recommendations made their way into our final report to the Board of Supervisors from our time leading the Litter Task Force in 2020. Other recommendations and data collected by our Clean Streams Program have been shared across many statewide and regional environmental networks—including at the 2022 Virginia Marine Debris Conference, at NOAA Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan stakeholder meetings, and many state-wide partner meetings such as the Virginia Coastal Alliance and the Virginia Plastic Pollution Prevention Network.



We have also expanded our public-private partnership with the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services to work on Operation Stream Shield—a program which provides assistance for individuals experiencing homelessness through part-time employment opportunities cleaning up litter. We're excited to join forces with OSS leadership to brainstorm ways to capture litter data from OSS work, helping us piece together the puzzle into a bigger picture of the state of litter in Fairfax County.

This year, Clean Fairfax continued to provide important information and a healthy dose of fun to our Fairfax community through environmental education programming, several awareness and social media campaigns, presentations, and events. Entering its fourth year, our 2023 EarthDaze event was a huge success! The event, graciously hosted by our friends at Aslin Beer Co. in Herndon, was attended by **over 2,000** and featured sustainable vendors, activities, and green educators to celebrate Earth Day. The Covid-19 pandemic gave us an opportunity to realign our priorities around Earth Day, leading to our new Earth Month+ programming—in which we create a month-long calendar of earth-friendly events and tips, post content, and share resources on our socials & website. We were able to sponsor the past two Mount Vernon Environmental Expos, and table at numerous environmental town halls. In total, we spoke at **20+** presentations, events, and workshops this year, which reached **over 6,200** students and residents. Some of the highlights include: speaking on the value of Public-Private Partnerships at the Stormwater & Litter Workshop in March and our three-part educational [Plastic Pollution Webinar](#) series, which we presented in September with our organizational partners Clean Virginia Waterways, Lynnhaven River Now, and Environment Virginia.

Our small but mighty Clean Fairfax family continues to grow and this Fall we welcomed a new Program Manager, Vanessa Goad. Vanessa is a lifelong environmentalist, who brings extensive nonprofit and local government experience to the team. Finally, our esteemed Clean Streams Coordinator Emeritus, Zach Huntington, returned to Virginia and is now the Director of Clean Virginia Waterways (CVW). We continue to collaborate closely with Zach and CVW as we work for a cleaner Commonwealth and Mid-Atlantic region!

As you can see, our small team gets **a lot** done here at Clean Fairfax! We're subject matter and technical experts, policy advocates, presenters, authors, advisors, and altogether busy bees. As we continue our good work going into 2024, we ask you to keep us in mind as a trusted source of environmental & sustainability information in Fairfax County and the broader region. **This Spring, I finished up a 4 year appointment on the Virginia Plastic Waste Prevention Advisory Council and I definitely have some thoughts about that.**

Our resources are available online, on social media, in-person at events, and over the phone—we would love to help you work out your litter, clean water, plastic pollution, sustainability, and environmental policy quandaries!

JENNIFER COLE
Executive Director

