



Norfolk Environmental Commission Annual Report July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020

Message from the Chair

The activities of the Norfolk Environmental Commission's for fiscal year 2020 are as different as two sides of the same coin. One side is before COVID, and the other is after. The Commission always encourages face to face programs, intending to teach by example. We were in the schools reading books to kids, planting trees, and unloading cars in the recycle lines. We worked with city employees to make sure citizens have a voice in all projects with an environmental component. We traveled to Richmond to ensure our representatives heard our point of view.

And then, in what seemed like a flash, everything changed. No more face to face. No place to meet. Some projects put on hold. All commissioners' lives were changed. We are all volunteers and priorities were suddenly different. Nevertheless, within 60 days of the first statewide COVID notice, the commission was getting back to business, albeit adapting to new communication strategies. Now, we are reasonably productive and effective.

The Commission seized this opportunity to reevaluate our priorities. We created a survey for Commissioners (Full and Associates) to seek their input/wisdom with an eye toward sharpening the focus of our group. There are many priorities. What should be first? And once that picture is in focus, we intend to seek similar input from Norfolk City residents.

Over the years, we have worked on many issues - now with a focus on resilience. With the COVID crisis, we learned our lesson well. Our commissioners have many talents and a passion to care for our environment. Nothing will stop us. Consider joining our ranks.

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.

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.

NEC Projects and Accomplishments

Initiatives managed by the Executive Committee this fiscal year included: a letter to Norfolk City Council opposed to the proposed gaming casino; assisting the Mayor and City Council in meeting the commitment of the Global Covenant; and acted as an advisor on the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Climate Action Plan. The Executive Committee hosted four special guest speakers at regular NEC business meetings to inform and educate the NEC on important environmental issues. Speakers included topics such as Hampton Roads Transit, sea level rise/flooding issues in the area, Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas, and the Virginia Department of Transportation HRBT Expansion Project.

Since its inception in 2014, the *Plastic Bag Recycling Program for Schools* has collected and recycled more than 25,000 pounds of plastic (over 12 tons) or more than two million bags. The program has involved more than 6,000 students, teachers, and volunteers, and included coordination with Civic Leagues and Garden Clubs.

Since the NEC took on the Green Reader Program in 2017, the NEC has enlisted more than 200 volunteers from across the community including local police and fire personnel, Norfolk Master Gardeners, and high school students. We have served 31 Norfolk elementary schools and read to over 4,100 children.

Commissioners served a collective 750 volunteer hours during FY20. Commissioners volunteer across a myriad of causes, organizations, and events such as: recycling in Norfolk; increasing Norfolk's tree canopy; recognition of citizen efforts to improve Norfolk's environment; membership in the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, Friends of Norfolk's Environment, and the ERP, among other organizations; and participation in Norfolk Recycles Day, Clean the Bay Day, and Arbor Day, and the Green Reader Program.

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.

FY2020 Executive Committee

Chair: Audrey Webb
Vice-Chair: Stephen Leaman
Vice Chair: Rooney Rosmer
Secretary: Theresa Dunleavy
Member-at-large: Roberto Lovick
Member-at-large: Deb Mosher

FY2021 Incoming 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

* Elections conducted June 2020 and new officers installed July 2020.

Committee and Task Force Reports

- 1) **BOARD GOVERNANCE:** assist the Executive Committee and working committees; work to ensure proper functioning and overall effectiveness of the NEC.
 - a. Continue new commissioner orientation.
- 2) **COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** across five committee task forces, lead the effort to support relationship building in the community through effective communication of NEC goals and programs.
 - a. Printed Materials and Reports: implement strategies from commissioner developed communication plan to meet the needs of the NEC and support individual committees and task forces; develop materials for community events as needed.
 - b. Social Media: (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) conduct outreach via social media tools, provide updates on local environmental events and educational information on relevant environmental issues, share details on how to participate locally in environmental volunteer events.
 - c. Website: coordinate updates to the webpage with the city.
 - d. Community Events: coordinate representatives being present at key community events such as Engage Norfolk, Arbor Day Celebration, and Jamn' Jamz tree adoption. Reps inform visitors about the NEC activities and programs.
 - e. Speakers Bureau: in the planning process.
- 3) **ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS AND RECOGNITION:** recognize individuals, organizations, and businesses whose activities or accomplishments, large and small, lead to a more environmentally sustainable and resilient City of Norfolk.
 - a. In FY2020, presented three awards to two individuals and one business. Awards included recognition of litter prevention, solid waste reduction, sustainable food practices, stormwater pollution prevention, ecofriendly gardens/tree plantings/landscaping/community gardens, environmental education and community outreach, environmental resilience, and wetlands enhancement/restoration.
- 4) **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. Provide legislative priorities to City Council to help inform the city's policy setting process.
 - b. Develop letters of support or opposition on behalf of the NEC for City Council review stating NEC positions on key environmental policy decisions.
 - c. Legislative priorities for FY2020 included addressing Sea Level Rise, reducing litter in our waterways, opposition to offshore drilling, funding for stormwater improvements.

- 5) WATER QUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE:** across three committee task forces, support programming and citizen education to improve water quality and resilience of Norfolk's environment.
- a. Watershed Signage: work with the City's Department of Transit to manufacture and install signs at unmarked water body crossings. Watershed signs increase public awareness of the importance and extensive size of the watershed and encourage good stewardship of our valuable creeks, streams, wetlands, rivers, lakes, ground water, and eventually the bay.
 - i. Completed a design standard for signage with the Department of Public Works Division of Environmental Storm Water Management and Department of Transit, Division of Transportation.
 - ii. Ongoing initiative to identify locations for installation of new signs.
 - b. Underground Storage Tanks (USTs): formed in the fall of 2018, identify abandoned fuel oil USTs and rank tanks based on environmental risk (leaking tanks can "erupt" during high water/flooding events) and begin remediation. This program became a catalyst for a regional effort in monitoring.
 - i. Team of 30 people from the NEC, City of Norfolk OPEN DATA, Norfolk Fire Department, Old Dominion University Post Graduate School.
 - ii. Plan to identify USTs and converting UST paper cards and ledgers to a digital database (estimated tanks: 60,000).
 - iii. Ongoing investigation of septic tanks and monitor in partnership with the Elizabeth River Project.
 - c. Sustainable Shorelines Workshops: provide citizens information about the protection, benefits, and enhancement of wetlands; increase wise decision making in shoreline resiliency.
- 6) YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION:** across three task forces, led programs to guide elementary and middle school children of Norfolk toward proactive environmental stewardship.
- a. Plastic Bag Recycling in Schools: ongoing program since 2014 to introduce/educate Norfolk students about recycling and reduce litter; engage local volunteers to interact with students and school staff; and to steer schools toward more effective recycling programs:
 - i. Support from numerous NEC members and community volunteers, including Norfolk public and private schools, community organizations, and local grocery stores (for bulk recycling).
 - ii. Due to COVID, collection activities ended in March 2020. There were no metrics reported for the school year.
 - b. Green Reader Program: for two weeks each November, volunteers read selected environmental books to Kindergarten and Third Grade classrooms.
 - i. Enlisted volunteers from the NEC, citizens, police and fire personnel, City Council, Norfolk Master Gardeners, and high school students.
 - ii. For FY2020, served 9 schools and read to more than 1,200 children.
 - iii. Secured grant funding and donations to purchase copies of books to hand out to each child to whom volunteers read.

- a. 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. Representatives participate as regular non-voting members under the guidance of an assigned NEC mentor.
 - i. For FY2020, the NEC selected two high school representatives.

Future NEC Initiatives

- 1) Continue current programs, task force work, and community outreach. Based on ongoing internal and external surveys, put in place new programming as needed.
- 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) Water Quality and Environmental Resilience task force on USTs planning next phase of UST removal plan by surveying fuel oil service companies to identify "in service" tanks (specific locations, size, inspection frequency, age); and investigate financial assistance for remediation from the Commonwealth/Department of Environmental Quality.
- 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.