Recommendations for Immediate Climate Action
by Fairfax County Based Upon CECAP

Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions (FACS) believes that Fairfax County’s new “County-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan” (CECAP) is a major step forward. Yet, in reality, it’s a vision statement. The hard work of meeting CECAP goals will require the sustained efforts of all of us. But most importantly, it requires the leadership, commitment and tenacity of the Board of Supervisors and staff.

CECAP goals are strong. Along with sector goals, there are three benchmark goals:

- **By 2030**, Fairfax County will reduce GHG emissions by 50% from a 2005 base year.
- **By 2040**, Fairfax County will reduce GHG emissions by 75% from the 2005 base year.
- **By 2050**, Fairfax County will achieve carbon neutrality with at least an 87% reduction in GHG from the 2005 base year.

**How do we achieve the 2030 goal of a 50% reduction — only nine years away?** FACS believes we must get to work on immediate priorities now.

There are 12 Strategies and 37 Actions in CECAP to reduce climate change. Where to begin? FACS believes that all of the Strategies and Actions should be implemented now. Community education initiatives are important. However, a dedicated team of FACS activists have been analyzing the Plan and propose priorities for immediate action. These are in two areas:

- Recommended Activities for Implementation for the County, and
- Recommended Activities for Implementation for the County Requiring State Enabling Legislation.

**We have ranked our priorities based upon the largest greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction that will result.**

The Board of Supervisors must direct the Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC) and other staff to move quickly. **Time is not on our side.**
1) Transportation (CECAP Strategies/Actions 7, 8, 9 page 110 of CECAP)

The transportation sector contributes approximately 50% of GHG pollution in Fairfax County, and particulate pollution that causes health problems and lost workdays, especially among low-income communities and communities of color. Because of the large reductions possible by prioritizing transportation, FACS recommends the County undertake the following actions:

- **Accelerate Vehicle Electrification Efforts**: develop a comprehensive electrification plan for the County’s 6000+ vehicles (including 300+ transit buses), taking into account the recommendations of the County’s Joint Environmental Task Force (JET). This will help it access funds from Virginia’s Making Efficient and Responsible Investments in Transit (MERIT) program and its Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP), plus federal programs that help localities fund electric transit.

- **Rapidly Deploy Electric School Buses and Transit Buses**: The FACS transportation team has met with interested parties, including Jared Walker of the Electrification Coalition and most recently with Matt Stanberry of Highland Electric Fleets to learn more about an electric school bus leasing program that helped Montgomery County (MD) accelerate electric school bus deployment, and how the Fairfax County Public Schools might emulate this budget-neutral “turnkey” approach. FCPS has issued a Request for Information regarding school bus electrification, which Highland Electric Fleets is responding to.

- **Promote Biking and Walking**: The CECAP report urges the County to work with state and regional partners to expand walkable paths and bike trails, to interconnect them, to plant trees along trails and sidewalks, to install additional bike racks at transit stations and elsewhere, and to increase pedestrian and bicyclist safety, all while minimizing incursions into resource protection areas (RPAs) and minimizing the loss of native tree canopy, contiguous forested areas, permeable carbon-sequestering soil, and other arable green spaces (in alignment with Strategy 12, which calls for preserving, restoring, and expanding natural systems, green spaces, and soil quality). This could be informed by “The Active Fairfax Transportation Plan: Fairfax County Bicycle Master Plan and Countywide Trails Plan Update,” released in January 2020. The report also urges the County to seek state funding opportunities — including expected revenues from the Transportation & Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P), if Virginia joins that regional effort — to implement “Complete Streets” policies to allow safe travel by those walking, cycling, driving, taking public transportation, or delivering goods, with street designs that often include trees.

- **Promote Public Transit, De-incentivize Automobile Use**: The CECAP report urges the County to work with state and regional partners to invest in public transit, expanding current routes and creating new ones; to create reduced or no-fare programs or other incentives for low-income people, seniors and students using public transit; and to further incentivize public transit use by considering increased parking fees at County facilities, and the creation of local congestion fees, zero/low emission delivery zones,
and pedestrian-only zones in densely populated areas. It also recommends the use of zoning and land-use codes as planning tools to create higher density neighborhoods, and mixed-use and transportation-oriented developments. The report also notes that the state could help reduce VMT by implementing a mileage-based automobile user fee program.

- **Accelerate Charging Infrastructure, and Financing:** Several recommendations focus on charging infrastructure, such as installing EV chargers at County facilities; streamlining permitting and inspection processes for EV infrastructure; and using existing zoning and land-use codes to incentivize or require installation of EV charging infrastructure in new buildings and for on-street parking.

- In addition, the report addresses financing, urging the County to take advantage of federal grant opportunities, and to help incentivize EVs and related infrastructure (such as through tax exemptions and permit fee reductions).

**State Actions:** the County should ask the Virginia legislature to pass enabling legislation authorizing the following:

- **Establish a state green bank** to support transportation electrification.

- **Adequately fund two recently created state programs,** the EV Rebate Program (HB1979), which could help lower-income people purchase EVs; and the Electric Vehicle Grant Fund and Program (HB2118), which focuses on helping fund electric school buses.

- **Participate in the Transportation & Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P).** This “cap-and-invest” program would lower greenhouse gas emissions and generate millions of dollars for Virginia to use in speeding the transition to a clean-energy future.

2) **Building Energy Efficiency (Strategies/Actions 1, 2, 3 page 55 of CECAP)**

Residential and commercial buildings contribute 24-25% of GHG pollution in Fairfax County. To cut GHGs and address energy poverty, FACS supports regulation and programs to increase the energy efficiency of residential and commercial buildings. CECAP estimates increasing the energy efficiency and conservation in existing buildings would cut 13% of GHGs needed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Electrifying existing buildings would cut 11% of GHGs. Implementing green building standards for new buildings would cut only 1% of GHGs. Localities have limited authority to require greater efficiency. State legislative and regulatory action and authorization to let local jurisdictions implement energy efficiency programs will be needed in many cases. Although CECAP recommends many more strategies, FACS recommends prioritizing a smaller set that should have the greatest impact:

- **Establish new green building incentive programs:** Support the establishment of a local green bank, C-PACE, Residential Property Assessed Clean Energy (R-PACE), and public/private partnerships to support energy efficiency and conservation renovation of
existing commercial and residential buildings, construction of new buildings, and upgrading the energy efficiency of building infrastructure (e.g., HVAC, lighting, insulation, roofing, etc.).

- **Other priority incentive programs**: high-performance building density zoning bonuses, permit streamlining, property tax incentives, audit programs, and accelerated permitting or review. Incentives should include residential as well as commercial building construction and major renovation.

**State Actions**: the County should ask the Virginia legislature to pass enabling legislation authorizing the following:

- **Mandate building and building infrastructure energy efficiency standards** more stringent than state building codes.
- **Require public disclosure of energy utilization intensity** (EUI) of existing and all new government, commercial and multi-unit residential buildings.
- Real estate point-of-sale requirements, building energy retuning programs; energy efficiency retrofit requirements or building energy performance requirements; and Time of Use regulations for lighting and HVAC.
- **Mandate energy use intensity reductions** in government and larger commercial buildings.
- **Mandate restrictions or elimination of on-site natural gas or other fossil fuel** use in new construction and major renovations, and electric hookup capabilities for residential kitchen appliances, HVAC equipment, and/or electric vehicles.

**Other State-wide legislation**:

- **Implement statewide GHG emissions requirements** for new residential and commercial buildings via siting and permitting regulations.
- **Adopt stringent building energy efficiency codes statewide** using the most current national green building standards for new construction.
- **Mandate energy use intensity benchmarking** of government, commercial and multi-unit residential buildings, and establish building energy performance requirements.

**State-wide incentives for energy efficient construction and building infrastructure upgrades**:

- Financial incentive programs could include a state-wide green bank, statewide C-PACE, utility on-bill financing, utility charge financing, utility energy efficiency mandates, and R-PACE. Incentive programs would help finance building energy efficiency and conservation retrofits and infrastructure equipment upgrades. Require utilities to
implement more aggressive electrification solutions through mandatory energy efficiency incentive programs.

3) Energy Supply (Strategies/Actions 4, 5, 6 page 84 of CECAP)

To achieve our goals, we must quickly replace fossil fuel energy sources with renewable energy ("green power") and battery storage. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published a quarterly ranking of the Top 30 Local Governments that reflects the amount of renewable green power as a percentage of total electricity use. Fairfax County is not one of them.

FACS recommends the County prioritize the following energy supply actions:

- **Purchase renewable energy, through Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs),** that is additive to the regional power grid (PJM) for County operations and not Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) as they are currently formulated.

- **Work with businesses to have them participate in these off-site PPA’s,** as Arlington County has done with Amazon’s HQ2.

- **Establish a county Green Bank** to provide favorable terms with an eye towards supporting the lower-and-middle income (LMI) community in the acquisition of onsite solar.

- **Amplify education regarding solar for homeowners and businesses** that is already occurring via the Northern Virginia Regional Commission’s Solarize NoVA program. Solarize NOVA is a one-stop-shop for community members to learn more about solar power options for their homes and businesses, and facilitate the installation and financing of their own project. Through bulk purchasing and free solar site assessments, Solarize NOVA puts solar within reach. Having a Fairfax County Green Bank in place would make Solarize NoVA a more attractive program.

- **Implement Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) for County residents and businesses.** By aggregating the electricity demand CCA can negotiate lower rates and choose a greater percentage of renewable energy. This should be an “opt out” program.

- **DO NOT participate in the greenwashing recommended in Strategy 6 regarding recovered gas.** It is too expensive and creates as much CO2 when burned as any methane product. Supplies are very limited and recovered gas should be reserved for processes where electrification cannot accomplish the job as with some manufacturing.

State Actions that Fairfax County should have on its legislative agenda:

- **Legislation that would allow localities to offer incentives for solar/ electrification of homes and businesses with an eye to higher incentives for LMI homeowners.**
• **Fix legislation for Community Solar** if the State Corporation Commission’s ruling continues to allow Dominion Virginia Power’s current $75 minimum bill.

4) **Preservation, Restoration & Expansion of Natural Systems, Green Spaces and Soil Quality (Strategy/Actions 12 page 154 of CECAP)**

Fairfax County’s 2017 Environmental Vision states the “conservation of our limited natural resources must be interwoven into all government decisions; and the Board must be committed to provide the necessary funds and resources to protect and improve the environment for better quality of life now and for future generations.”

Strategy 12 aligns with the Natural Resources Sector Goal to expand the tree canopy to 60% with a minimum of 40% tree canopy coverage in every census block by 2030 and a minimum of 50% tree canopy coverage in every census block by 2050, prioritizing areas of highest socioeconomic need first.

When climate planning is designed equitably to include communities suffering disproportionate impacts, everyone benefits by stronger economic growth, a healthier population, and less reliance on county financial support. Also, mature green spaces attract wildlife whose own habitat has been damaged. Healthy ecosystems with a high diversity of native plants and animals are more stable than artificially supported ecosystems, protecting groundwater from pollutants, reducing both soil erosion and the risk of flooding during increasingly strong storms. This insulates residents, businesses and the county government from rising insurance costs.

State and federal entities can provide funding, research and development for the preservation, restoration, and expansion of natural systems, green spaces, and soil quality.

FACS recommends the County undertake the following actions:

• **Preserve and expand tree canopy** and green spaces, and improve soil management.

• **Initiate new and strengthen current programs that conserve existing trees.** This should include changed land use regulations, better design requirements, more incentives, and stronger penalties. Conducting a natural resources inventory should be the first step in every site plan to preserve existing trees. The Tree Commission’s 2019 Tree Action Plan and ongoing recommendations can guide the county.

• **Expand financial tools like the Tree Preservation & Planting Fund** to include tree planting in private spaces; work with volunteer corps to plant trees across the county, and work with homeowners’ associations to add trees/native vegetation to existing spaces.

• **Create a Cross-Disciplinary County Staff Team** to evaluate where climate change and natural resources intersect which would, at a minimum, incentivize or require conservation of tree canopies or green spaces in development projects.
5) Waste (CECAP Strategy/Actions 10 page 135 of CECAP)

There is no good option for disposing of waste. When we bury it, landfills leech toxins and emit methane gas. Burning trash, as we do in Fairfax County through incineration, is damaging to our health, our resources and is costly and polluting. Most often, our landfills and incinerators are located in communities of color. This is why we must focus on Zero Waste. Zero-waste living means reducing trash to the bare minimum—a worthy goal considering that in Fairfax County most trash is burned in the Covanta incinerator in Lorton. And that Covanta is the largest single-source of GhG in the County.

FACS recommends the County prioritize the following waste reduction actions:

- **Develop a detailed county-wide Zero Waste implementation plan** that includes specific policies and that Fairfax county government can implement to achieve zero waste by 2040. The plan should include timelines, responsibilities and performance metrics. In the absence of a plan, there is no way that this zero-waste goal will be reached. Task the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) to implement the Zero Waste plan.

- **Specific recommendations in CECAP should be integrated in the Zero Waste plan**, including pay to throw, clean recycling, and curbside composting, as well as construction and demolition debris management, bans on single use plastics and extended producer liability legislation. CECAP recommendations are not exhaustive. The plan should include waste reduction practices already implemented in thousands of cities and regions around the world.

**County actions that can cut waste now, while it develops a comprehensive implementation plan:**

- **Implement a Pay-to-Throw Program**: you pay more to throw out more, replacing the current single fee for all-you-can-throw-out. This is the single most impactful step the County could make to reduce waste and increase recycling by 50% or more. A revision of Section 109 to include residential trash would be comparable to what all commercial customers already have. Bigger commercial dumpsters are more expensive than smaller dumpsters. We encourage the County to immediately implement a Pay-to-Throw for all the residential customers serviced by the County. Based on that experience, it should be required of private residential haulers. Over 7,000 communities have successful pay-to-throw programs. The County should switch all their residential customers to a pay-to-throw program, and mandate all haulers do the same within a year or two.

- **Expand composting opportunities.** The County should pilot a curbside collection with their own residential customers. We support establishing more drop off sites, perhaps alongside the Purple Can Glass Recycling dumpsters. The County should develop pilot compost collection at several of the County operated subsidized housing facilities to
pilot composting at multifamily facilities. Another area we should be looking at is piloting compost mandates or incentives at facilities that generate most food waste scraps, such as hotels, grocery stores, and restaurants.

- **Focus on collecting cleaner recyclables.** Clean recyclables have a high market value, but contamination increases sorting costs and decreases the value of the dirty recycled material. Manufacturers have a harder time using recycled feedstock, so they use less recycled material. Currently, every hauler picks up whatever is in the blue recycling bin, regardless of contents. If the garbage man opened the lid and saw significant contamination, he should leave the bin behind. This is a surefire way to engage the customer into learning the recycling rules and stop harmful contamination. But every company must do this. 90% of our residences and all commercial waste is handled by private haulers. The county should revise Section 109 to make the private haulers responsible for what they pick up as recycling. If all haulers were required not to pick up contaminated recycling, the County would provide a level playing field where no company would maintain an advantage if one company picked up contaminated recycling without complaint and the next company made their client mad by not picking contaminated recycling.

**State Actions that Fairfax County should have on its legislative agenda:**

- **Push for an 80% state recycle rate for large sanitary districts.** Twenty years ago, Virginia mandated a 25% recycle rate for large sanitary districts. We exceeded that 19 years ago. We need a new goal to achieve zero waste. Increasing the State recycle rate would promote new action on recycling, including ERP laws for things many other states already recycle mattresses, paint, beverage containers, packaging, batteries and electronic waste. Producers and fast-food restaurants that depend entirely on single-use food and beverage packaging should be held responsible for the costs of litter clean ups, recycling, waste disposal and should be taxed accordingly.

- **Enact state legislation on Extended Producer Responsibility**, also known as product stewardship, which requires producers to take responsibilities of the end of life of the products they produce. EPR laws for beverage containers, paint, mattresses, batteries, packaging, electronics waste and others all exist in other states. Producers and fast-food restaurants that depend entirely on single-use food and beverage packaging should be responsible for the costs of litter clean ups, recycling, and waste disposal. Virginia should incentivize and encourage producers to create and use products that are truly reusable, biodegradable, and/or easier to recycle.
About Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions:

The 3,000 activists and supporters of FACS are drawn from over 100 congregations, synagogues, temples, mosques and meeting houses throughout Northern Virginia. A six-year-old nonpartisan, nonprofit, FACS believes that addressing the climate emergency is an urgent moral imperative.