



Fiscal Affairs Advisory Commission
Report to the County Board

FY 2024 Proposed Budget

Budget Area:	Department of Environmental Services Non-transit programs/funding
FAAC Reviewers:	Peter Robertson, Blake Barnhill
Date of FAAC Action:	March 6, 2023
Presented By:	Peter Robertson, FAAC Chairman

FAAC Opinion:

FAAC Recommendation #1			
FAAC recommends that the County Board adopt the County Manager’s proposed budget for the Department of Environmental Services non-transit related programs/funding.			
Vote	Yes: 11	No: 1	Abstain: 0
Comments			

Future Considerations

1. The FAAC commends the County Manager for preparing and proposing a budget for DES that is consistent with the County’s fiscal realities, but that still invests where investments are necessary to sustain and improve services and infrastructure.
2. The need for continued investment in stormwater facilities remains urgent. We are failing sufficiently to manage global greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the negative effects of climate change. The requirements of the Total Maximum Daily Load requirements under the federal Clean Water Act, reflected in the County’s MS4 permit, will grow exponentially in the next permitting period. The Board wisely endorsed the aggressive recommendation of the staff for increased investment in all three categories of stormwater infrastructure. The FAAC urges the Board to continue its support for such investment, as we believe it will be required for some time. We also encourage the Board and County staff to explore creative solutions such as repurposing street space for stormwater facilities.

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3. The FAAC acknowledges the often-stated benefit that the total local tax burden for Arlington County is less than many other local jurisdictions. The FAAC recognizes that County residents have benefited from a favorable contract for solid waste services for many years now. Further, the increased rate proposed by the Manager is comparable to market rates for other local jurisdictions. The FAAC points out that, while the advertised real estate tax rate has not been increased, property values have increased, so most County homeowners will see an increase in their property taxes (the average homeowner will pay \$369 more in real estate taxes in CY 2023 than in CY 2022 at current tax rates, according to the Manager's proposal). Given that, and given the regressive nature of a flat increase in the Household Solid Waste Rate, the FAAC does recommend that the County Board consider the 32.7% increase in the Household Solid Waste Rate and whether there are ways to ameliorate the effects of that increase on those least able to afford it.

Whether or not the rate can be modified, the FAAC urges that the Board require the DES to engage actively in a program of education for County residents that transparently communicates the coming increases and describes the reasons those increases are necessary.

4. FAAC encourages DES to continue its efforts to develop performance measures that go beyond measuring output or workload, and in particular to develop performance measures that align with applicable targets in the County's comprehensive plan elements and other related master planning documents. FAAC encourages DES to revise its performance measures to better reflect variables that are within DES's control, and to better describe or indicate where factors that are outside of DES's control (weather, cost of raw materials, demand or consumption patterns, etc.) have impacted a particular performance measure. FAAC especially encourages the DES to consider measures of customer satisfaction as an important performance measure.
5. FAAC would like to see increased transparency regarding the percentage and type of household solid waste collected at the curb as recycling materials that is actually accepted for recycling, rather than being incinerated. FAAC would like to consider whether the current recycling program is the most efficient method of collecting recycling materials, or if there are alternatives that are (i) more effective at increasing the materials accepted for recycling, (ii) more cost-efficient, or (iii) have better alignment between household behavior and the requirements of a recycling program.

We would like to thank the County staff for their willingness to provide information and insights.