

July 28, 2025

To: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
cc: Christopher Herrington, Director, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services

Re: Community Concerns Regarding the Proposed Unified Sanitation District and Organics Collection Initiative

Dear Chairman McKay and Members of the Board:

On behalf of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations, we thank the Board for its environmental leadership and acknowledge the importance of advancing sustainable waste management. However, based on the information currently available, we find that the proposal to establish a Unified Sanitation District (USD) and implement an organics collection mandate lacks critical clarity and transparency.

We respectfully request that the Board address the following **core concerns** before taking the matter up for action:

Transparency: Public release of the County's survey instrument, methodology, and analysis;

Land Use: Disclosure of facility siting plans and environmental impacts;

Environmental Justice and Legal Authority: Assessment of disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities and legal authority over HOA-managed services;

Wildlife and Operations: Clear guidance on container requirements and mitigation of wildlife impacts;

Small Business Protections: Inclusion of measures to promote access for local and minority-owned waste haulers; and

Cost Comparability: Side-by-side cost modeling relative to peer jurisdictions and current market rates.

1. Transparency and Public Input

The County has not released the full survey instrument used to gauge support for the USD. As a result:

- The sample selection methodology, demographic representation, and contact method (e.g., phone, mail, online) remain unclear;
- Key trade-offs—such as service changes, cost implications, and enforcement mechanisms—may not have been communicated transparently; and
- Without access to the full dataset, residents cannot assess the survey's validity or relevance to their communities.

Recommendation: Release the complete survey instrument, sampling framework, response rate, and crosstabs for public review. Establish that it meets accepted standards of social science reliability.

2. Land Use Implications and Facility Strategy

The County has not identified where or how collected organic waste will be processed. This lack of specificity raises concerns regarding:

- Potential zoning changes, facilities siting, or land acquisitions—none of which have been shared with the public;
- Absence of an environmental review or traffic study related to composting infrastructure or transfer stations; and
- Risks of odor, groundwater contamination, and neighborhood disruption, particularly in proximity to parklands or residential zones.

Recommendation: Publish a transparent siting and facility strategy, including community engagement plans, environmental impact reviews, and contingency options for processing capacity.

3. Legal Authority, Enforcement, and One Fairfax Review

The proposal lacks clarity on enforcement mechanisms and legal authority, particularly in communities with existing waste management arrangements:

- It is not clear whether the County has authority to override private HOA covenants that already require or provide for contracted waste services explicitly in their declaration, and who would bear the cost for associated legal reviews;
- Households that compost independently or manage organics on-site may be unfairly penalized under a blanket mandate; and
- The proposal lacks an assessment to evaluate disparate impact on lower-income neighborhoods, seniors, and rural households.

Recommendations:

Provide a legal rationale for the County's authority to impose USD structures (and fees) in HOA-managed communities.

Publish an impact assessment aligned with the One Fairfax policy to ensure equitable implementation and avoid unintended burdens.

4. Wildlife-Resistant Container Standards and Operational Clarity

Several jurisdictions implementing organics programs – such as Montgomery County (MD), New York City, and Boulder (CO) – have documented increases in rodent and wildlife encounters without proper containerization.

The current proposal does not clarify:

- Whether residents must purchase new wildlife-resistant bins;
- Who bears the cost of containers or ongoing sanitation needs; and
- What collection frequency and hygiene protocols will be in place to mitigate health and nuisance risks.

Recommendation: Establish and publicize a strategy for distributing wildlife-resistant bins, clarify financial responsibilities, and provide peer jurisdiction case studies with mitigation lessons.

5. Impacts on Local and Small Waste Haulers

The proposal could displace numerous small, often minority- or immigrant-owned, businesses currently providing valued services to many communities particularly those communities with private roads:

- The County has not committed to contract segments or pricing accommodation that would preserve access for these haulers; and
- Pew Research and others note that flexible, niche haulers often outperform large providers in customer service and affordability.

Recommendation: Develop and explain options for reserving procurement pathways for small haulers, such as local business preference points, district-by-district carve-outs, and transitional support for capital upgrades or insurance requirements.

6. Transparency in Cost and Fee Comparisons

Residents still lack clear information about how the proposed USD fees compare to current market services:

- Tipping fees, container costs, and administrative overhead are not consistently accounted for;
- Peer jurisdictions (e.g., Arlington County) exclude certain costs from residential bills, leading to incomplete comparisons; and
- No mechanism has been disclosed for how USD rates may escalate over time or what safeguards exist to prevent overreach.

Recommendation: Publish a transparent, line-item cost model showing short- and long-term price scenarios, comparison to market rates and regional benchmarks, and price adjustment formulas or escalation caps.

Concluding Remarks

We remain committed to supporting the County’s environmental goals and offer our collaboration to develop a more equitable, legally sound, and publicly accountable plan. To that end, we propose to meet with members of the Board (or your designees) in an online working

session during the week of September 8th to further our shared goal of advancing sustainable waste management.

We request that you include this letter in the public record, and we welcome further dialogue.

Sincerely,

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations



Morgan Jameson
President

President@FairfaxFederation.org



Dave Fitzgerald
First Vice President

vp1@fairfaxfederation.org



Anna Dixon
Chair, Services Committee

services@fairfaxfederation.org

Chair, Environment Committee

environment@FairfaxFederation.org