

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

c/o Department of Environmental Services

2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705

Arlington, VA 22201

September 10, 2015

The Honorable Mary Hughes Hynes, Chairwoman
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Year-Round Yard Waste Collection

Dear Chairwoman Hynes,

The Energy and Environment Conservation Commission (E2C2) has been informed that the Board will consider the adoption of year-round yard waste collection at the October meeting. The Commission would like to express its support for an affirmative vote on this measure.

At current, based on Arlington County's Solid Waste Bureau's waste audits, yard waste accounts for 26.4% of household waste being disposed and collected for landfills, while recyclable materials account for 18%. The relatively low percentage of recyclables remaining in the waste stream is a direct benefit of the curbside, year round recyclable collection program that has become standard across the country and certainly in Arlington County. Yard waste presents itself as the next large portion of disposed waste that can feasibly be diverted through curbside pickup and composting.

Our neighbors in the region, including Alexandria, Fairfax County, and the City of Fairfax already employ year-round yard waste collection in their solid waste disposal plans. Arlington County currently offers the lowest solid waste collection rates in the region, and, under the prevailing contract rate for yard waste collection and disposal, would remain the county with the lowest rates even with the addition of the new year-round yard waste program. Given this, not only should Arlington County be able to add the new service, the County has an incentive to do so—and many Arlingtonians agree. According to a 2012 Solid Waste Bureau study, 91.7% of a random sample of 1,340 Arlington residents were supportive or neutral towards the addition of year-round yard waste collection.

In 2014, the recycling rate in Arlington County was 47.2%. According to estimates by the Solid Waste Bureau, adding year round yard waste collection would amount to a recycling rate potential of about 62%, diverting up to an additional 9,000 tons of compostable material from disposal at the Waste to Energy facility. These measures are consistent with the Solid Waste Management Plan's (SWMP) recommended voluntary enhancements schedule. In fact, the Solid Waste Committee recommended that year round yard waste collection take place in FY 2012.

Arlington County's existing yard waste collection program is limited and in some regards too cumbersome for residents to expect high participation rates. The County currently provides curbside pickup for seasonal yard waste only in the spring (March and April) and fall (November,

December and January). This excludes a number of months when yard waste can continue to be expected, for example lawn clippings during the summer months. Currently, yard waste is only collected in 32 gallon or smaller containers, as tied bundles, or in brown paper bags that residents may buy or pick up on a seasonal basis from various County locations. Yard waste that is disposed in plastic bags is collected as refuse. With the addition of year-round yard waste collection, collection containers designated for yard waste would increase the ease with which residents are able to collect and dispose of yard waste without the risk of it being collected as refuse. Moreover, we believe that the distribution of yard waste collection carts will play an important role in establishing the habits needed for a full-scale commingled organics collection program in the future.

Arlington County is a progressive leader in many regards. On the topic of yard waste collection however, it lags behind several neighboring counties. The contracted collection rates will maintain Arlington's position as having the lowest rates in the region, even after the addition of year-round yard waste collection. The Commission believes that year-round yard waste collection is an important measure that should be adopted as it will benefit the region's environment as well as maintain the County's leadership in environmentally sustainable practices. Additionally, the Commission asks that the County Board continue to pursue and allocate resources to further sustainable waste reduction measures, including exploring a path to achieving zero waste.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Dicke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "S".

Scott Dicke

Chair, E2C2