

**Issue:** The Fairfax County Trails, Sidewalk and Bikeways Committee (“Committee”), in conjunction with the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (“FCDOT”) Active Transportation Office (“Staff”), needs to develop a strategic focus to fulfill its chartered purpose more efficiently and effectually.

**Background:** The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (“Board”) chartered the Committee “for the purpose of providing citizen input and oversight to planning and developing a non-motorized transportation system and trails serving the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians. Magisterial District members advise on request for waivers to the Comprehensive Plan.” (Fairfax County Trails, Sidewalks and Bikeways Committee By-laws) (Note: non-motorized transportation is now referred to as Active Transportation)

**Discussion:** The chartered purposes and how they are currently carried out by the Committee can be summarized as follows:

- Citizen input: inputs by Committee members to Staff; public input to Committee members at public meetings or via e-mail or other means of communication
- Citizen oversight: as citizen appointees, committee members receive reports from Staff that can serve as the basis of recommendations to the Board
- Serve pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians: two bicycle and one equestrian advocacy group are members of the Committee.
- Advise on waivers (“Sidewalk Waivers”) to the Comprehensive Plan (Magisterial appointees only). Members very occasionally are asked to make a recommendation on builder requests to waive building sidewalks required by the Comprehensive Plan. These recommendations go the respective supervisor, who makes the final determination.

The Committee is an advisory body only and has no decision-making powers. It can only make recommendations to the Board via a letter from the Chair of the Committee to the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors. The Board does not currently communicate recommendation or inputs directly to any other governmental body (e.g., VDOT, Fairfax County Park Authority, NOVA Parks, National Park Service, etc.) or private entities (developers, trade associations, highway construction firms, etc.). The By-laws are silent on whether the Committee could do this. In any case, all correspondence traditionally has been with the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

As the foregoing illustrates, the Committee gets input from Staff about ongoing projects falling within its purview. In practice, this has amounted to a large portion of every meeting being devoted to a “date dump” by the Staff representative or review of voluminous, often hard-to-understand reports. Until recently, the primary Staff representative was the overall manager of the Staff who had an encyclopedic knowledge of every project in the County, its history, its funding source, and its current status. However, the Staff itself is designed around planners responsible for specific projects or areas of specialization. With the recent retirement of the overall manager, there is no single person on the Staff with the knowledge of all projects. Thus, by necessity, the Committee and the Staff must seek a new way of interacting. This also begs the question whether the Committee should even get “down in the grass” with respect to bike/pedestrian

projects, which are the responsibility of Staff and not the Committee to manage. In other words, just what should “oversight” mean in terms of the Committee’s stated purpose and how it operates?

**Conclusion:**

1. With internal changes to the Staff, now is the opportune time to develop new protocols for Committee/Staff interactions in terms of what the Committee expects from the Staff in terms of support.
2. This also means that now is an opportune time to explore ways for the Committee to be more strategic, as opposed to “tactical,” in how it can influence active transportation goals in support of the County’s Strategic Plan

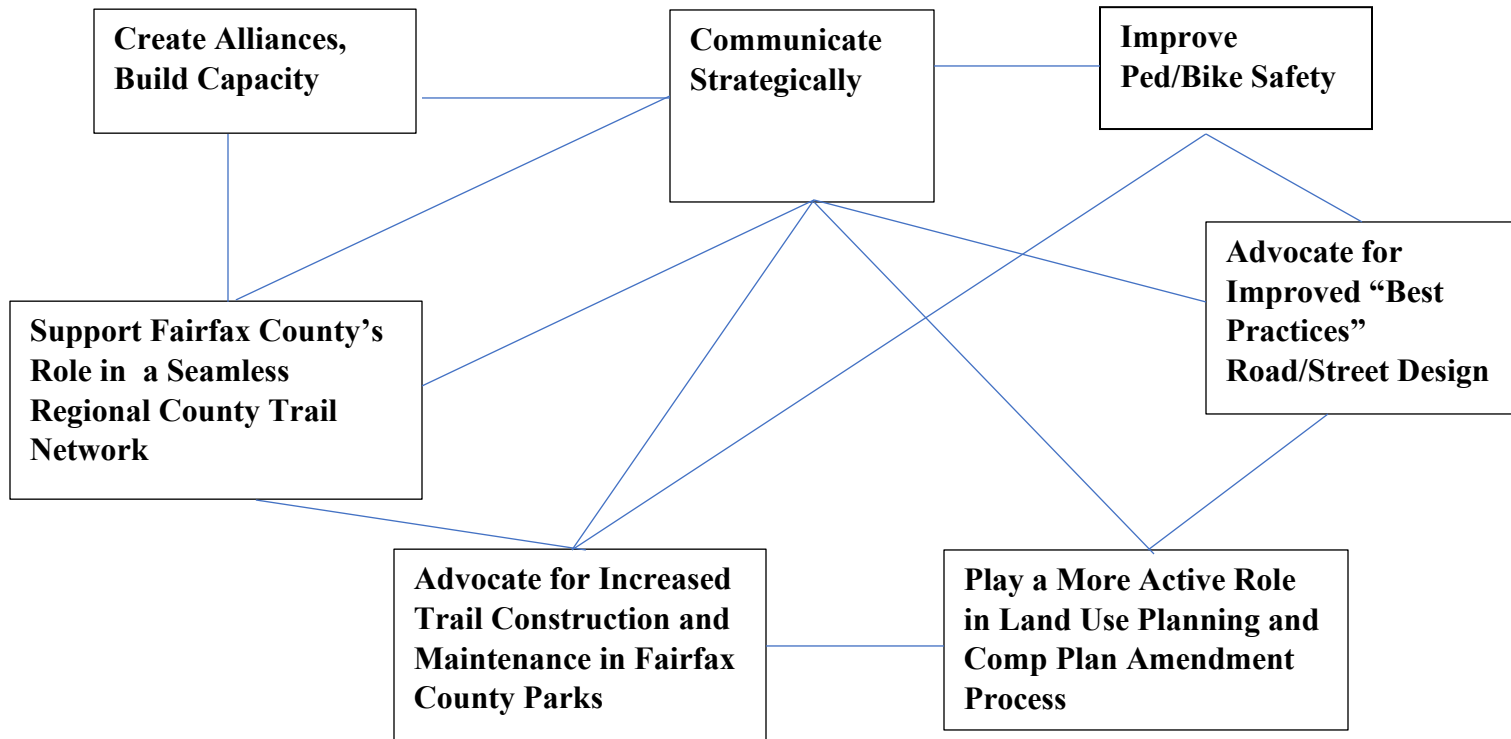
**Recommendations:**

1. The Staff should identify publicly-available status reports and databases to replace the time-consuming “data dumps” at meetings, thus reducing Staff workload related to briefing the Committee on a large list of projects at monthly meetings.
2. The Committee should develop a list of strategic active transportation priorities to guide its activities and identify necessary sources of information to assist in its deliberations on these priorities. (See Appendix A)
3. The Staff should develop a workable method to provide necessary technical advice to the Committee regarding priority items under discussion.
4. The Staff should advise the Committee on how better to influence projects at the inception through more involvement with Comprehensive Plan amendments processes. While it is the function of Staff to deal with the technical aspects of any proposed land use change, the Committee could be a stakeholder in the Comp Plan amendment process to ensure that all active transportation equities are protected at the policy level.
5. The magisterial appointees should coordinate more closely with their respective supervisor’s staff aides responsible for land use planning/Comp Plan reviews, transportation, and parks in order to be able to influence policies in order that active transportation equities are included in all plans and projects from the outset, and not, as it typically is now, once they are already approved, funded, and scheduled.

**APPENDIX A**

**STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS**

**ACTIVITY SYSTEM DIAGRAM**



## ACTIVITY SYSTEM DIAGRAM EXPLANATION

**An Activity System Diagram shows how major functions interact to create an efficient and focused operational design for an organization. For the Trails, Sidewalks and Bikeways Committee, this means identifying functions that synergistically support each other in achieving the goals of the Committee. The lines connecting the blocks show this graphically. Below are supporting comments keyed to each function:**

**Improved Bike/Ped Safety:** arguably, this is our number one priority and one which the other activities support in one way or the other. The current level of pedestrian and cyclist fatalities in Fairfax County is unacceptable. There are systemic causes to explain most of these deaths: faulty road design in terms of bike/ped facilities, poor lighting, victim behavior, etc.

**Create Alliances, Build Capacity:** the focus here is to find strong partner organizations whose goals match those of the Committee. Examples would be WABA, FABB, MORE, Fairfax Trails and Streams, Potomac Heritage Trail Association, magisterial district councils (e.g., South County Federation, Braddock District Council, etc.), Fairfax Families for Safe Streets, and potentially many others. Building capacity means increasing the number of organizations and citizens who will support and amplify Committee efforts.

**Support Fairfax County's Role in a Seamless Regional County Trail Network:** this requires working with partners to influence policy and planning. Two major regional trails are the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and the National Capital Trail Network (spearheaded by the Capital Trails Coalition). Other players in the development of a connected network of trails include neighboring jurisdictions (Prince William County, Loudoun County, Arlington County, and the independent cities within Fairfax County) and regional organizations such as COG, Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (on which several Fairfax County supervisors sit), and VDOT (for trails/bikeways) along roads and highways. We need to influence our Board of Supervisors to coordinate with these many organizations and governmental bodies.

**Advocate for Increased Trail Construction and Maintenance in Fairfax County Parks:** the number of trails, their connectivity, and their overall accessibility to a variety of users is key if Fairfax County is to play a role in a regional network of trails.

**Play a More Active Role in Land Use Planning and Comp Plan Amendment Process:** instead of finding out about projects once they have been funded and started, we should be in on the initial planning. While staff offices are supposed to protect the interests of active transportation users in developing and approving land use proposals, direct citizen input is also needed. As the County committee charged with this role, we need to have a seat at the table, starting at the district supervisor level.

**Advocate for Improved “Best Practices” Road/Street Design:** we need to get smarter about current active transportation “best practices” as they apply to road/street design. The staff can help us here by providing technical information about pertinent AASHTO/NACTO standards as well as programs like “Safe Streets for All,” “Complete Streets,” “Vision Zero,” and others. Once we are smarter, we can become better advocates to our Board of Supervisors.

**Communicate Strategically:** at present, we communicate only with the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors and by extension, with the entire BOS. Magisterial members keep their respective supervisors apprised of Committee actions and discuss specific active transportation projects within their district. Meeting minutes and our letters to the BOS are posted on the FCDOT website. (Arguably, finding these items is not straightforward for the average citizen.) Possibly we should consider a Facebook page to have a larger presence in the community. This would directly contribute to our advocacy functions and alliance/capacity-building efforts.

In summary, focusing on these inter-related activities will move us from being a backward-looking “tactical” observer of projects to a forward-looking “strategic” player whereby we would function as an advocate, stakeholder, and influencer in all matters related to active transportation planning in Fairfax County.