



2023 Annual Report

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Overview

The Green City Commission (GCC) was established by Richmond City Council in 2009. The responsibilities and duties of the Commission include:

- providing expertise and information to the City to support its sustainability efforts;
- consulting with state government and other local governments regarding sustainability efforts and methods;
- recommending changes to the Code of the City of Richmond, Code of Virginia, and other laws as necessary to implement sustainable methods in the City;
- encouraging the adoption of sustainable business and building approaches by the private sector;
- working with the Department of Public Works to preserve trees and plant life in the City; and
- preparing and submitting an annual report to the Council.

The Commission is comprised of nine members, seven appointed by Council and two appointed by the Mayor, serving terms of three years and limited to two consecutive terms. The Council-appointed members include one member with expertise in urban forestry and representatives in the fields of sustainability, green building practices, energy efficiency and environmental protection.

The Commission is required to meet at least quarterly.

Commission Member List

Name	Criteria for Appointment	Status	Term	Commence	Terminate
Daniel Klein Chair	Environmental Protection Rep. (Appointed by Council)		1st Term	11/9/20	10/26/22
			2nd Term	8/25/22	10/25/25
Daniel Hart Vice Chair	Sustainability Rep. (Appointed by Council)		1st Term	11/14/22	10/25/25
David Evans Secretary	At Large Rep. (Appointed by Council)		1st Term	7/23/22	7/22/25
Emily Francis	At Large Rep. (Appointed by Mayor)		1st Term	1/19/18	8/10/20
			2nd Term	11/9/20	8/10/23
Laura Thomas	Employee of Richmond Office of Sustainability		1st Term	5/18/23	8/10/26
Bill Nickerson	Energy Efficiency Rep. (Appointed by Council)		1st Term	11/9/20	10/26/22
			2nd Term	8/25/22	10/25/25
Christiane Riederer	At Large Rep. (Appointed by Council)		1st Term	7/25/22	10/25/25
Rob Jones	Forestry Rep. (Appointed by Council)		1st Term	10/26/23	10/26/26
Luis Huertas	Green Building Rep (Appointed by Council)		1st Term	5/8/23	10/25/25
Victor McKenzie	At Large Rep. (Appointed by Mayor)		1st Term	11/14/23	8/10/26
Alicia Zatcoff	Employee of Dept. of Public Works (Appointed by Mayor)		1st Term	1/16/18	8/10/20
			2nd Term	11/9/20	2/23/23

2023: A Year of Growth

2023 was a transition year for the Green City Commission (GCC). We welcomed new members Rob Jones (Forestry rep.), Luis Huertas (Green Building rep.), Laura Thomas (Employee of Richmond Office of Sustainability), and Victor McKenzie (At Large rep) and said farewell to outgoing Chair Emily Francis and the City's outgoing Sustainability Manager Alicia Zatcoff. Daniel Klein (Chair), Daniel Hart (Vice-Chair), and Dave Evans (Secretary) were elected to new officer positions this year.

The Green City Commission continues to support and advocate for the realization of the City's climate action goals. In 2020, the City passed Resolution 2020 – R024 to “recognize the effects of global warming caused by human activity and to establish a climate action goal to achieve a 45 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 from the 2008 baseline.”

The GCC elected to track four local environmental issues drawn from the 2021 Climate Emergency Resolution (No. 2021-R049) and RVAgreen2050 plan. Members met with local organizations, departments, and communities to better understand these four issues and report back to the GCC for discussions on ways the commission can lend support.

- Urban Forestry
- Compost + Waste Mitigation
- Soil & Water Conservation District / Virginia Conservation Assistance Program
- Inflation Reduction Act homeowner incentives

Learn more about the GCC 2023 agenda [highlights](#) or [detailed meeting minutes](#) on the following pages.

As the GCC settled into our 2023 agenda, Laura Thomas, Richmond's new Director of the Office of Sustainability, reorganized and expanded the Office of Sustainability. Thomas' eager and reliable information sharing at commission meetings enabled the members and the public to stay updated on the complexities of the City's sustainability efforts, progress, and constraints.

As we look to 2024 the GCC is poised for yet more transition. We will be resuming in-person meetings with hybrid options for participants to call in. The GCC shifted to remote meetings in March 2020 and this resumption marks a symbolic end to the COVID-19 pandemic for this group. The world has changed in fundamental ways in the last three and a half years and the GCC is eager to adapt to the new opportunities and challenges of building a more sustainable and resilient Richmond in a post-COVID world.

Updated language for the GCC is nearing completion which would rename and reframe the commission to better align with RVAgreen2050 and define its focus relative to other commissions, specifically the

Clean City Commission, Urban Forestry Commission, and the Public Utilities Commission. The proposed changes would rename the GCC to the Richmond Sustainability & Resilience Commission (SRC), remove the Forestry-related language, and broaden the verbiage to reflect both existing and future master plans, as well as evolving Federal and State climate action programs..

We look forward to a productive 2024 as we work towards a more sustainable and resilient Richmond.

Summary of 2023 Agenda

We greatly appreciate the actions of Council and the Administration to expand the Office of Sustainability with a newly-formed Director position and to re-orient the Office within the City's organizational structure. Sustainability is cross-cutting. Decisions made across the City's jurisdiction have wide ranging impacts on air pollution and climate change, which then have serious impacts on individual residents, communities, and local businesses. It is critical that the Office of Sustainability has the ability to work across all sectors of City government to implement programs that reduce pollution, financial and health risks associated with climate change, and advance environmental justice in Richmond. Thank you for that critical shift this year. We look forward to continuing our work alongside the newly-positioned Office of Sustainability.

Urban Forestry

Supported by Daniel Klein (Chair, Environmental Protection rep.) & Rob Jones (Forestry rep.)

- Creation of the Urban Forester position
- Reconstitution of the Urban Forestry Commission
- City awarded \$6 million for City Tree Inventory Update
- Successful 4th Annual ArborDayRVA forestry event series

We greatly appreciate the actions of Council and the Administration for creating Richmond's first official Urban Forester position. Michael Webb joined DPW's Urban Forestry division earlier this year and leapt into his role to engage the community, update city tree policies, and coordinate among departments + divisions. His role also includes administration of the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) and leading the Urban Forest Master Plan process.

This year Council also adopted [Ordinance 2023-331](#) which breathes new life into the Urban Forestry Commission. With Michael Webb's administration, the UFC will accept appointments from the public for the first time in almost a decade and was updated to include Public Works (DFPW), Parks (PRCF), and Sustainability (OOS) representatives. The commission's first task is to draft a report with recommendations for updates to the language within the first 6 months of reconvening. Much like the GCC, updating the UFC ordinance will better align urban forestry objectives outlined in Richmond 300,

tree canopy and equity language in RVAgreen2050, and stormwater language in RVAH2O as well as clearly define the purpose and function of the UFC.

The city, in partnership with Sustainability, DPW, and Parks, as well as Southside Releaf and Groundwork RVA, received a \$6 million grant for a city tree inventory update in formerly redlined communities. This inventory will be an asset for the Urban Forestry division's care and management of our urban forest and also play an essential role in the upcoming Urban Forest Master Plan process.

2023 also ushered in Richmond's 4th annual ArborDayRVA, a citywide event series that celebrates our urban forest. This year's ADRVA included 12 tree giveaway stations, 5 tree planting events, 10 tree care workdays, 5 walking/biking tree tours, and 3 workshops all free and open to the public.

This annual event is coordinated by Reforest Richmond and held in partnership with the local and regional entities including:

- Urban Forestry division (DPW)
- Stormwater Management (DPU)
- Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities (PRCF)
- James River Park System (JRPS)
- Office of Sustainability (OOS)

Partners also included non-profits, community organizations, and private businesses including:

- Richmond Tree Stewards
- Southside Releaf
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- James River Association
- Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
- Capital Trees
- True Timber
- Richmond Grows Gardens
- The Science Museum of Virginia
- Richmond Community ToolBank
- RVA Urban Wood
- VCU Sustainability
- Neighborhood Resource Center
- 500-Year Forest Foundation
- The Nature Conservancy
- Keep Virginia Beautiful
- Chimborazo Native Food Project.

Compost + Waste Mitigation

Supported by Christiane Riederer

- The City's composting pilot program, courtesy of Richmond Grows Gardens (PRCF) with support from DPW and the Clean City Commission, uses libraries and community gardens as drop-off sites and shows promise.
- A new industrial-scale compost processing facility within the Richmond area is necessary to facilitate expanding the pilot to a full-scale Citywide program.
- There is great potential for using city brownfield and capped landfill sites for solar or other green utilization.

The composting pilot coordinated by Kate Rivera of Richmond Grows Gardens under PRCF was highly successful. Broader implementation will require increased educational outreach and an expanded network of compost drop-off sites. There is also potential for increased partnership between the City and private composting companies as well as consumer-facing landscaping stores such as Lowe's, Home Depot, landscapers, and plant nurseries, for sale of compost created at an industrial scale composting facility.

Expanding the city's existing relationship with the Central Virginia Waste Management Authority (CVWMA) to offer dedicated compost bins for residential and business customers and investing in an industrial-scale compost facility would dramatically improve the City's waste diversion and mitigation efforts. The City could also embrace programs like RVA Urban Wood to divert felled trees and yard waste from landfills towards compost production, wood mills, or landscaping uses.

Currently only single-family residences receive recycling service. City ordinances must be updated to ensure better access to recycling and composting options for multifamily residences, restaurants, breweries and other commercial entities.

Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)/ Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

Supported by Dave Evans (Secretary)

- Richmond joined the James River Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) through partnership with the Capital Region Land Conservancy (CRLC) and Richmond Department of Public Utilities (DPU)
- Launching VCAP with a backlog of interested community partners.

Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) was developed by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD's) to provide technical and financial assistance to promote voluntary implementation of stormwater best management practices (BMPs). VCAP assistance is provided following successful application to the program by property owners and is on a cost-reimbursement basis (80% of eligible costs).

The City of Richmond entered into a contractual agreement with the James River SWCD to bring the VCAP program to the City. JR-SWCD has arrangements with the Capital Region Land Conservancy (CRLC)

to receive VCAP applications from City property owners and conduct field evaluations of applications. The SWCD Board considers and approves or rejects applications for VCAP financial assistance.

During 2023 the SWCD and CRLC worked to develop program implementation protocols and consider some 30 applications received from Richmond property owners. As of mid-November, 7 site visits had been completed with an additional 10 planned to occur through January 2024. One VCAP project was approved for funding in 2023. The most common practice in initial applications was the permeable pavement BMP and a majority of applications came from the western end of Richmond. The City and SWCD plan significant outreach in 2024 to promote VCAP assistance with a goal to reach economically and socially disadvantaged property owners.

The Green City Commission regularly monitored program implementation with the SWCD manager and City and worked to facilitate communications and issue resolution as needed. During 2024 the Commission will continue to monitor implementation relative to the environmental outcome and social justice goals of the program and engage to support effective implementation of VCAP within the City.

2023 Meeting Dates & Attendance

- January 23, 2023 - 12:00 – 1:30 pm
- March 20, 2023 - 5:30 - 7:00 pm
- May 15, 2023 - 12:00 - 1:30 pm
- July 17, 2023 5:30 – 7:00 pm
- September 18, 2023 12:00 – 1:30 pm
- November 27, 2023 - 5:30 – 7:00 pm

Member	1/23/23	3/20/23	5/15/23	7/17/23	9/18/23	11/27/23
Daniel Klein	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Daniel Hart	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
David Evans	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Laura Thomas	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bill Nickerson	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Christiane Riederer	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Emily Francis	N	Y	Y	N	n/a	Y
Rob Jones	n/a	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Luis Huertas	n/a	n/a	Y	Y	N	Y
Victor McKenzie	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Y
Alicia Zatcoff	Y	N	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a