

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVOCACY GUIDE

VIRGINIA CONSERVATION NETWORK
2021



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LOGISTICS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CALENDAR OF THE YEAR

Each year, you can expect a similar timeline of events that make up the legislative calendar. The conservation movement has built its calendar in tandem with the legislative process, so VCN and its partners provide opportunities to come together at key moments throughout the year.

We have broken the calendar up into quarters to help you navigate this process. We'll start at the end of the year, since elections in November shape the rest of the year.

Q4: ELECTIONS (OCTOBER-DECEMBER)

The entire state Senate is up for election every four years (2015, 2019, etc) while the state House of Delegates is up every two years (2017, 2019, etc). The governor's race also takes place every four years (2013, 2017, etc). In October of election years, campaigns are at full steam. The best thing that you can do to support pro-environment policy is to volunteer for candidates with strong conservation values by knocking on doors, making calls, and helping fundraising efforts.

After voting in early November, we begin mobilizing our movement to meet with legislators, new and old. The chambers choose leadership positions like Speaker of the House and Senate Majority Leader, and committee leadership positions are slowly rolled out through the end of December.

In early December, VCN holds Legislative Previews across the state, open to anyone who would like to attend, to present which issues and policies we will be fighting for inside and outside of the building and make plans for local advocacy. Those policies come directly from the Common Agenda, the policy index written and approved by our partner organizations.

Q1: GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION (JANUARY-MARCH)

The state legislature convenes in early January and lasts for 45 days in a non-budget year, and 60 days in a budget year (the budget years follow the state elections, so 2020 was a budget year, and 2022 will be the next one).

Representatives in each chamber will introduce legislation in subcommittees, smaller bodies of a given committee, which will vote to move the legislation forward or not. When legislation is "not recommended" by the Senate, it still has a chance to pass in the full committee and then on the Senate floor. In the House, however, that particular version of the bill is "dead" if the subcommittee does not recommend it, and won't make it to a floor vote--at least not in its current form.

Here are the committees where most conservation legislation is introduced or moves through:

- Senate: Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources; Finance and Appropriations; Commerce and Labor; and Transportation.
- House: Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources; Appropriations; Labor and Commerce; Finance; and Transportation.

In the first several weeks, it is most important to get in touch with your representatives to advocate for conservation legislation, especially if they sit on an important committee. If you can, schedule a time to drop by the office early on. If you can't make it in, join VCN for our annual Conservation Lobby Day in January.

Then, keep up the (positive) pressure: follow up with phone calls and emails as the legislation moves through committee, especially if there are substantive changes to the bill.





In early to mid-February, the bills that passed in one chamber will “cross-over” to the other chamber to be voted on, following the same pattern of appearing in subcommittees and then committees prior to a full floor vote. If there are two analogous bills introduced in opposite chambers and the substance cannot be reconciled, the bill will go to “conference,” where its language will be negotiated and finalized by the sponsors and, usually, high-ranking officials like the Senate Majority Leader. Then, it will go to a full floor vote.

Bills must be approved by both chambers by the end of session (mid February or early March) to make it to the Governor’s desk to be signed into law or vetoed in April.

Q2: (APRIL-JUNE)

The dust is settling on session in April, when the Governor approves (or vetoes) legislation. Legislators will briefly reconvene afterwards to consider the Governor’s amendments and vetoes. Legislators can reject changes and vetoes with a 2/3rds majority.

In April, then, things are quieting down in the building. As a conservation community, however, it is already time to begin strategizing about how to build on our victories next year. We hold Regional Meetings with our partners to debrief session and solicit input for our Common Agenda, and then Workgroup Meetings (Energy, Lands, etc) to begin drafting policy positions.

During May and June, while the memories are still fresh and elected officials have more open schedules, conservationists should reach back out to legislators to thank them for their votes or sponsorship, or let them know if they were disappointed by a legislators’ votes. Some legislators will hold town halls; attend them, be vocal, and bring friends! This is a strategic time to focus on building relationships with legislators to set the stage for your ongoing communication throughout the year.

Q3: (JULY-SEPTEMBER)

This is the quietest time of the year in Richmond, which makes it a strategic time to organize your community. This is a good opportunity to hold or attend advocacy workshops, research the issues, and start mobilizing to get out the vote for candidates you support. As they generally have more open schedules during the summer--though most have day jobs--it is a particularly good time to schedule a visit with your representatives in their district offices or via video conference.

The Common Agenda is usually released and sent to legislators and VCN partners in early August, as well as becoming publicly available online. Many legislators already turn to the Common Agenda when drafting policy, and using the papers within as reference points for your meetings will let a legislator know that your suggestions have been vetted by the conservation community.

It can be helpful to keep an eye on which bills have been filed and which committees they have been referred to for votes. In December and early January, before the General Assembly convenes, bills will start to be “pre-filed” and pop up in the Legislative Information System (<https://lis.virginia.gov/>). LIS will be updated throughout Session as bills are filed, referred to committees, and voted on. Keeping up with the action can help you figure out which friends you should nudge to get in touch with their representatives.

VCN maintains a Bill Tracker (<http://www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker/>) throughout the year that details every bill the Board and Legislative Committee have voted on. It contains talking points, whether we voted to support, oppose, or stay neutral on the bill; and who in our coalition you can contact for more information.

LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM (LIS)

Legislative Information System (LIS) is full of helpful information but rather difficult to navigate. Let’s follow SB5106 (Local land use approvals; extension of approvals to address the COVID-19 pandemic) from 2020’s Special Session.

You’ve heard there is some legislation about land use, but can’t remember the bill number.

Click **Bills and Resolutions**. From there, you can search by member, committee, or subject. But it may be easiest to just search for a key word.

2020 SPECIAL SESSION I

Convened August 18, 2020

Bills & Resolutions: *Status of individual bills and related information*

General Assembly Members: *Member sponsored legislation*

Standing Committees: *Legislation referred to committee*

State Budget: *Budget bills, committees and summaries*

Go to “**Searchable Databases**” on the left and click Bills & Resolutions. Then, type in your key words; in this case, I searched “Land use.”

Bills and Resolutions search result

Your search found 5 references in 5 documents. The number of references follows each document description. Perform another search or look at some **examples** to help you refine your search.

all types

exclude failed legislation

HR538 (show hits) ..Commending Lorna L. Parkins... (1)
CHAP0040 (show hits) ..Local land use approvals; extension of approvals to address the COVID-19 pandemic.. (1)
SB5106ER (show hits) ..Local land use approvals; extension of approvals to address the COVID-19 pandemic.. (1)
SB5106 (show hits) ..Local land use approvals; extension of approvals to address the COVID-19 pandemic.. (1)
SB5106S1 (show hits) ..Local land use approvals; extension of approvals to address the COVID-19 pandemic.. (1)

There’s my bill! Click the original version of the bill, SB5106. On that page, I can see the text of the bill, the patron(s), and where the bill currently is in the legislative process (it might say, during the Session, “Referred to Committee on Local Government,” for example).

Now that Special Session has concluded, I can click **History** and see how the bill moved through both chambers.

HISTORY
08/18/20 Senate: Prefiled and ordered printed; offered 08/18/20 20200760D
08/18/20 Senate: Referred to Committee on Local Government
08/20/20 Senate: Reported from Local Government with substitute (10-Y 1-N)
08/20/20 Senate: Committee substitute printed 20200900D-S1
08/20/20 Senate: Incorporates SB5044 (Deeds)
08/26/20 Senate: Constitutional reading dispensed (34-Y 0-N)
08/27/20 Senate: Read second time
08/27/20 Senate: Reading of substitute waived
08/27/20 Senate: Committee substitute agreed to 20200900D-S1
08/27/20 Senate: Engrossed by Senate - committee substitute SB5106S1
08/28/20 Senate: Read third time and passed Senate (32-Y 4-N)
09/17/20 House: Placed on Calendar
09/17/20 House: Read first time

As you can see, the bill was referred to the Local Government Committee, passed with a 10 - 1 vote (click “08/20/20 Senate: Reported from Local Government with substitute (10-Y 1-N)” to see who supported or opposed the bill), and eventually passed the Senate with a large majority.

Then, the bill “crossed over” to be voted on by the House, starting in the Committee on General Laws.

So, let’s say it’s August 18th, 2020 and I’m interested in following this bill so that I can know when is the best time to call my representative--and get my neighbors to join me. I can see that the bill will next appear in Local Government, but when can I expect that Committee to meet? Click **Meetings** from the front page of LIS to see upcoming meetings; from there, you can see links to **Agendas** and **Dockets** (which bills they plan to discuss/vote on), as well as the **Live Stream Link** to follow the action live.

VCN BILL TRACKER

The good news is that, unless you want to stay extremely up to date, you don't need to delve through LIS very often. That's our job, and why we maintain our Bill Tracker: <http://www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker/>.

Above, you can see all of the bills that VCN took a position on during Special Session. It also links to talking points, and lists the "Last Action" (where the bill is in its legislative journey; i.e. "Referred to Committee on Commerce & Labor"), as well as which issue area it falls under.

The **Talking Points** will detail why we took our position and list the contact information for the person who wrote them so that you can get in touch for greater detail.

Planning to give your legislator a call or schedule a meeting with them? You can print out the talking points to refer to during your meeting.

Virginia Conservation Network Special Session Bill Tracker (2020)

☰ Drag here to set row groups

Bill Num...	Name	Sponsor List	Position	Issue Area	Talking Points
HB5003	Litter tax; refunds for penalties for late pay...	Joseph McNamara	Oppose	Water	Talking Points
HB5088	Electric utility regulation; triennial review pr...	Dawn Adams, Lashr...	Support	Good Government	Talking Points
HB5102	Employee safety; Voluntary Protection Prog...	Daniel Helmer, Chri...	Support	Good Government	Talking Points
HB5111	Va. Residential Landlord & Tenant Act; tem...	Hala Ayala, Lamont ...	Support	Good Government	Talking Points
HR510	Commending Lloyd J. Vye	Delores McQuinn	Support	Land Use & Transp...	

THE BUDGET PROCESS

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The Governor's Budget Proposal is the template for the House and the Senate's final proposals. Getting your goals in the Governor's budget is very important. The budget is supposed to be finished before the end of the General Assembly session. Since it is a very fast process, it is important to be knowledgeable of your goals and to have a plan before the General Session begins. If the Budget is agreed on by the end of Session, the House and Senate must call a special session, generally in the summer.

HOW YOUR VOICE CAN BE HEARD

Communicate with the pertinent agency in August and September about funding before they submit their own budget requests. Communicate with the Governor, the Secretary of Finance, and the Secretary of Natural Resources about your funding goals, so they know what is of value to constituents and what they should put in the Governor's Budget Proposal. Meet with your state delegate and senators and ask them to advocate to the agency and Secretariat in support of your budget priorities. If the Governor's Budget Proposal does not include your budget requests, follow up with a legislator, in both the House and the Senate, about getting a budget amendment submitted before the first Friday of General Session. Meet in your district with your legislators before the GA begins in January. Meet with members of the various budget committees and subcommittees, as well as the committee staff assigned. Attend any pertinent committee and subcommittee meetings.

TOOLS AVAILABLE TO HELP

The Virginia Conservation Network (VCN) publishes the briefing book with policy recommendations and funding requests in September, use this as your guide to know what to ask for. After the budget is released in December, VCN and Virginia United Land Trust (VaULT) hold a "Budget Briefing" to explain more clearly what has, and has not, been considered in the Governor's Budget Proposal. In January, attend VCN's lobby day and meet directly with your legislators.

USEFUL LINKS

- House Appropriations Committee <http://hac.state.va.us/welcome.htm>
- Senate Finance Committee <http://sfc.virginia.gov/>
- General Senate Information <https://apps.senate.virginia.gov/Senator/standingcommittees.php>
- General House Information <https://viriniageneralassembly.gov/house/members/members.php>



A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

AUGUST
State Agencies, like the DEQ and the DCR, begin creating budget proposals

SEPTEMBER
Agencies send requests to the DBP. The Cabinet Secretaries must approve these requested budgets.

NOVEMBER
The Governor's Office reviews the agencies' requests and forms his/her own Budget Proposal

DECEMBER
The Governor's Budget Proposal is submitted to the General Assembly

JANUARY
The House Appropriations committee and Senate Finance committee hold public hearings about the Governor's proposed budget.

MARCH**
A Conference Committee is held, with 4 Conferees from the Senate and 4 from the House. An official Budget Proposal is produced, using parts of the individual House and Senate Proposals.

MARCH**
The Joint Proposal is sent to the Governor, and he/she may sign, veto, veto specific items, or send it back to the GA with amendments.

SENATE

JANUARY
Senators must submit any Budget Amend-ments by the first Friday of General Session to the Senate Finance Committee

JANUARY
The General Assembly begins and the Senate Finance committee begins amending the Governor's Budget Proposal, and creating their own Senate Budget Proposal. The Senate Finance committee is split into subcommittees that discuss specific aspects of the budget– such as the Economic Development and Natural Resources Subcommittee.

FEBRUARY
The committee must report its budget the Sunday after Cross-over*. After this, the Senate discusses and votes on the proposal. After the Senate proposal is passed, it is sent to the House for approval.

HOUSE OF DELEGATES

JANUARY
Delegates must submit any Budget Amend-ments by the first Friday of General Session to the House Appropriations Committee

JANUARY
The General Assembly begins and the House Appropriations committee begins working on the House Budget Proposal. The House Appropriations Committee is split into more specific subcommittees– such as the Commerce, Agriculture, Natural Resources & Technology Subcommittee. (The House Finance Committee deals with taxation, and does not have a large role in creating the budget.)

FEBRUARY
The committee must report its budget the Sunday after Cross-over*. After this, the House discusses and votes on the proposal. After the House proposal is passed, it is sent to the Senate for approval.

* In short sessions (on odd numbered years) the committee must report its budget the Sunday before Crossover
 ** Any event occurring in March during long session must occur in February during short session due to time restrictions

WHO'S WHO OF THE BUDGET PROCESS

SENATE FINANCE AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Janet Howell, Chair: district32@senate.virginia.gov

Economic Development and Natural Resources Subcommittee:

David Marsden, Chair: district37@senate.virginia.gov

Frank Ruff: district15@senate.virginia.gov

Janet Howell: district32@senate.virginia.gov

Richard "Dick" Saslaw: district35@senate.virginia.gov

Emmett Hanger: district24@senate.virginia.gov

George Barker: district39@senate.virginia.gov

Subcommittee staff:

April Kees, Director: akees@sfac.virginia.gov

Jason Powell, Special Projects Deputy:

jpowell@sfac.virginia.gov

PERTINENT AGENCY HEADS

Dep of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

David Paylor

Dep of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

Clyde Cristman

Dep of Forestry (VDOF)

Rob Farrell

Marine Resources Commission (VMRC)

Steven Bowman

Dep of Mines, Minerals, and Energy (DMME)

John Warren

GOVERNOR AND CABINET

Governor

Ralph Northam

Chief of Staff

Clark Mercer

Secretary of the Commonwealth

Kelly Thomasson

Secretary of Administration

Keyanna Conner

Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry

Bettina Ring

Secretary of Commerce & Trade

Brian Ball

Secretary of Education

Atif Quami

Secretary of Finance

Aubrey Layne

Secretary of Health & Human Resources

Daniel Carey

Secretary of Natural Resources

Matthew Strickler

Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security

Brian Moran

Secretary of Transportation

Shannon Valentine

Secretary of Veterans & Defense Affairs

Carlos Hopkins

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Luke Torian, Chair: DelLTorian@house.virginia.gov

Mark Sickles, Vice Chair:

DelMSickles@house.virginia.gov

Commerce, Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee

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Ken Plum, Vice Chair: DelKPlum@house.virginia.gov

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Luke Torian: DelLTorian@house.virginia.gov

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Kim McKay, Analyst: kmckay@hac.virginia.gov

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2

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LEGISLATOR

WHO ARE MY LEGISLATORS?

The first step to state level advocacy is understanding our legislators: who they are, what they want, and where they will spend their time before and throughout the session. Virginia Public Access Project (VPAP), a nonpartisan website devoted to helping Virginians navigate the political system, provides an easy tool to find out who your representatives are: go to <http://vpap.org>, and click “My Representatives.”

This will show you who currently represents your district in the state Senate and House of Delegates. But there may have been turnover if there was a recent election, so you should check whether someone else will be taking office in January: click “Elections” under their name.

For example: let’s say I live in the Maymont Estate. In 2019, I searched my address at 1700 Hampton St, Richmond, VA 23220, and found that Glenn Sturtevant was then the state senator for my district, Senate District 10. By clicking

“Elections” under Senator Sturtevant’s name, I see that Ghazala Hashmi won District 10 in the November 2019 elections, making her my new Senate representative. So when I plan my course of action for making sure conservation is a top priority for my state senator, I will focus on Senator Hashmi.



WHAT DOES MY LEGISLATOR WANT?

For better or for worse, legislators do not approach the session as blank slates, and it’s important that we understand where they fall on the issues and which issues are most important to them. Incumbents have voting records, and both incumbents and newcomers will have a record of donations made to their election campaigns. Additionally, their websites will show which issues they prioritized in their election campaign. Committee assignments will determine which issues your representative has the most power over because bills will originate--and be voted on--in a given committee before they make it to the floor. Many elected officials will have robust social media presences, where they may also indicate issue stances as well as advertise events they are hosting or plan to attend. Finally, you can subscribe to get email updates from their offices throughout the session.

VOTING RECORD

The best way to determine where your legislator actually falls on the issues is to look at their voting record. There are two things you should look at: bills they have sponsored (indicating a high priority issue) and how they have voted on all bills introduced in recent sessions.

For example: My representative in the House of Delegates, Betsy Carr, is an incumbent. If I click “Vote Analysis” under her name, I can see which bills she sponsored under the aptly named “Bills Sponsored” and her overall votes under “Voting Analysis.” Delegate Carr has been in office since 2010, so I can also filter by year to look farther back into her voting record.

COMMITTEES

Under the “Committees” tab, you can see which committees your representative sits on. This matters because it may determine what issues they care most about and whether they can introduce a given bill.

For example: Delegate Carr sits on the House Transportation committee. If I am concerned about air pollution from cars in Richmond, I might want to advocate for increased funding for public transportation when I meet with her. Of course, I can also advocate for whichever issue I or my group is most concerned about, but it’s worth noting that she could wield greater influence on transportation issues than some others. introduced in recent sessions.

MONEY

Another way to assess which issues your representative might care the most about is to see who contributed the most to their campaign. Because the #1 priority for all legislators is to get re-elected, their donors matter. Click “Candidate,” and then click “Top Donors” on the right.

From here, I can filter by “Year” to see all contributions that have been made to Senator Carr’s election campaigns or contributions within a specific time period. This can provide some telling information.

For example: if I search “All Years,” I can see that Dominion Energy has donated over \$10,000 to Senator Carr’s campaigns over the years. However, in 2019, she did not receive any money from Dominion. Instead, she received the most money from the auto industry and the beer industry (among other business groups) and several large individual donors.

WEBSITE, EMAIL LISTS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

To get a full picture of your representative's priorities, you will want to search for their website, follow them on social media, and sign up for email updates.

Website and email: A simple "Betsy Carr campaign" Google search brings me to <http://www.betsycarr.org/>, and from there, I can search around to see which issues she highlights. From this website, I am also able to subscribe to her newsletter to get email updates from her office, which will notify me of upcoming events and brief me on her stance on current events.

Social media: search for your representative's name on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Not all representatives will have all three, but you should follow them on

whichever platforms they use to stay up to date on their opinions and upcoming events.

Bonus: this might feel like a lot of research, but if you want to go deeper, you can sign up to receive a Google alert (an email) whenever your candidate is mentioned in the news, which will give you a sense of their uncurated public image. It's easy to do: go to <https://www.google.com/alerts> and type in your representative's name.

If you take note of your representative's voting record, find out who their major donors are, look at their website, follow them on social media, and sign up for their newsletter, you will come armed to your meetings and phone calls with a lot of helpful information about how to most effectively make a case for your position.



3

CONSTITUENT LOBBYING

One of the most effective actions you can take is meeting with your representatives in person. Why? An in-person meeting puts a face (or, ideally, faces) to an issue, and allows you to make a more nuanced appeal. If you keep at it and continue to build a relationship with them throughout the year, they eventually look at you as someone they can reach out to about matters related to your issues.

That's the long term vision, but for now, we can focus on how to set up an initial meeting and what to do once you get there.

SETTING UP THE MEETING

Once the legislative session has begun, most representatives will be in Richmond or their district office from 9 - 5. But the best case scenario is that you meet with them in advance of the session to get them thinking about environmental issues before the unforgiving pace of the legislative session sweeps them away.

It is better if this request does not come out of the blue. To that end, you can send an initial email articulating who you are, the issue you would like to discuss, and that you are looking forward to working with them this year. The tone should be cordial, regardless of where your legislator has fallen in the past on the subject you want to discuss. Finish off by thanking them for their dedication to public service.

Legislator's phone numbers, emails, and addresses can be found at <http://viriniageneralassembly.gov>.

SAMPLE EMAIL TO REQUEST A MEETING WITH A LEGISLATOR

DelBCarr@house.virginia.gov

Requesting a meeting with Richmond Water Alliance

Delegate Carr,

My name is Emily and I am a constituent in the Maymont neighborhood. I am excited about the possibility of making progress on clean water issues this year and would like to request a meeting to talk about funding for Chesapeake Bay cleanup efforts. For more than 20 years, the Richmond Water Alliance has worked to advance clean water legislation, and I look forward to working with you this year.

Thank you,

Emily
Richmond Water Alliance
[Phone Number]

It is possible that you will get a response (likely from an aide) to this email, but you may need to follow up with a phone call a day or two later. The principles of the phone call are similar--state who you are, if you are a constituent, why you want to meet, and be friendly.

You may also need to follow up by calling back. Letting them know in advance that you will check in with them in a couple days will be helpful, as their staff person will understand you are not giving up on a face-to-face meeting in the near future.

Your legislator will be most available during the summer months, but plan to meet with them once a quarter. Having started building a relationship throughout the year, your meeting in November or December, right before session begins, will be all the more impactful.

Keep in mind that these are helpful meetings for your legislator. Usually, they have to do the hard work of figuring out what their community wants. By offering to come directly to your legislator with your priority issues, you are saving them time. State and local legislators do not hear from their constituents as often as you might imagine, so your request and your persistence will stand out.

PREPARING FOR AND RUNNING THE MEETING

You have a meeting scheduled. Now what?

The good news is you have already done much of the work by researching your legislator. At this point, you should have a rough estimate of where they stand on your issue. Perhaps they have broadly supported environmental initiatives, but no legislation about your particular issue has come up to a vote. Such a legislator is a “likely supporter.” A legislator who has voted against similar conservation initiatives would be a “likely opponent.” Or your official could be a newly-elected representative who didn’t

mention related issues during their campaign, so they fall into the “uncertain” camp. This will determine how you frame your issue.

Then, you will need to prepare what you want to actually say during the meeting. These meetings are frequently not very long, so you should get all the points you want to make (and there shouldn’t be more than a couple) on paper prior to heading in. Here is an example of a typical agenda.

SAMPLE AGENDA FOR MEETING WITH A LEGISLATOR

Beginning of the meeting

- Make a personal connection, catch-up or get to know them better (schmooze for a minute!)
- Thank them for something they did, or make a connection to an issue they highlighted during their election campaign

Campaign or issue presentation

- 2 to 3 minutes of easily digestible information; i.e. current state of pollution in the Chesapeake
 - » Visuals (pictures, a short video clip) are great!

Personal story

- How has this issue affected your life?

Ask

- What specific action do you want them to take?

Dialogue

- Get feedback from the decision maker
- Answer questions from them
 - » You should anticipate what questions they may have in advance, and type up a sheet with agreed-upon responses.
 - » If you don’t know the answer, never make it up. Tell them you will get back to them (and then do).
- Ask follow up questions
 - » A good question is always: “What would you need to see from your community to take X action?”
- Agree on a plan of action

Wrap up

- Determine a time to check back in, if the meeting was inconclusive
- Leave them with a one-pager with concise information about the issue
- Thank them for their time

Follow up

- Track everything: who was present, what the legislator agreed (or not) to, and the follow-up plan you developed
- Send a thank you email or letter
- Publicly thank (and tag) the representative on social media (picture included)
- Do anything you said you would do, like send follow-up info
- Stay in touch





PHOTO CREDIT: VIRGINIA CONSERVATION NETWORK

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Be friendly and cordial throughout the meeting

- Even if your legislator is a “likely opponent,” this is not the right setting for a combative attitude.

Tie your issue to their self interest!

- At this point, you know a lot about your legislator, so you should tailor your approach to their self-interest.
- For example: Delegate Carr received sizable donations from the beer industry and other business interests, and research has shown that beer will get vastly more expensive as a result of agricultural disruption tied to climate change.
 - » I won’t explicitly say, “I know the beer industry gave you money,” but I could say something like, “So many of the small businesses, like breweries, that make Richmond great will be jeopardized by climate change.”

Tell your personal story

- Why is this important? Stories are much more powerful than facts or figures, and likely to stick with your legislator. You may notice when politicians discuss policies they support, they will often reference a person whose experience underscores why the policy is so important. You could be that person!
- Lean heavily on imagery; paint a picture for them.
- Keep it short--a minute or two, at the most.

Have a specific ask

- You don’t want to merely ask your legislator to “support conservation initiatives” or something else vague. Instead, have a yes or no question prepared. “Will you support/introduce/sponsor legislation to fund the Chesapeake Bay cleanup?”

Give each person at the meeting a role

- Usually, you will come to these meetings with 1 - 3 other people. Each person there should deliver at least one part of the agenda.

Stick to your talking points

- It can be easy to get sidetracked if your legislator asks you a question that is not that relevant to your issue, or not within the realm of positions you or your group are advocating for.
- Simply and politely saying, “That’s an important question/issue, but the reason we are here today is to ___” is an effective tool to get back on message.

Practice!

- Prior to meeting with your legislator, the group that will be attending should get together to go over all the talking points, agree upon answers to anticipated questions, and role play the entire meeting from top to bottom.

Maintain realistic expectations

- Much of the time, your legislator will not agree on the spot to introduce, sponsor, or support a given bill, or even take a particular stance on an issue. They have a lot of factors to weigh--the committees they are part of, competing interests, and so on. That’s why following up after the meeting is so important--especially if they take some action on the issue you brought up.

MATERIALS

- Business casual to formal dress code
- Talking points for each person speaking
- Answers to anticipated questions
- Any visuals (pictures, short video clips)
- One-pager to leave with your legislator
- where its language will be negotiated and finalized by the sponsors and, usually, high-ranking officials like the Senate Majority Leader. Then, it will go to a full floor vote.
- position will be helpful for context, what really matters is that you make a positive impression and tell a compelling story.



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MEETING VIRTUALLY WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

If it is not possible to meet with your legislator in person, you can ask to set up a virtual meeting instead. Thankfully, the principles are largely the same. Here are a few additional things to keep in mind to keep the meeting running smoothly:

- If several constituents have set up a meeting together, it is doubly important to prepare an agenda together and determine who will cover which sections.
- Check your internet connection in advance to head off any technical difficulties that may eat up the limited facetime you will get.
- Keep your camera on (you want your legislator to recognize you!) and mute when you are not talking to keep background noise to a minimum.
- Share links to helpful resources or articles directly in the chat. You can share a one-pager about the issue you have come to discuss there, too, but be sure to also include it in your follow-up email.

IN CLOSING

While it might be intimidating to get in front of your legislator, once you do it, you will find that the vast majority are friendly and pleased to meet with you. It's important to remember that you are not expected to be an issue expert; instead, you are constituents (or, at least a couple people in your group are) that are highlighting an issue that matters to them. While giving them a few facts or figures about your position will be helpful for context, what really matters is that you make a positive impression and tell a compelling story.

These meetings are a chance for you to exercise your political voice and show legislators that environmental issues must be a big part of the conversation this year and every year. Imagine if every conservationist in Virginia met with their legislators.



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