



March 17, 2021

Arlington County Board Members

Mr. Matt de Ferranti, Chair

Ms. Katie Cristol

Mr. Christian Dorsey

Ms. Libby Garvey

Mr. Takis Karontonis

2100 Clarendon Blvd.

Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Recommended Environmental Priorities for the FY2022 Budget

Dear Members of the Arlington County Board:

We very much appreciated Chair de Ferranti's remarks to the EcoAction Arlington Annual Meeting on March 10, 2021 attesting that all five board members are committed to pushing ahead with a plastic bag tax, and that you are doing so as expeditiously as possible in a manner that comports with the state taxation requirements. EcoAction Arlington is also gratified about the inclusion of food waste composting in this year's budget. Well done! Naturally, we are also grateful for the County's continued support of EcoAction Arlington and acknowledgement of the value of our many programs that benefit Arlington. We applaud the County Board and Manager for addressing the pandemic challenges with skill and compassion for the hardships faced by so many residents affected by the crisis.

Our insistence that the County prioritize environmental issues is no less urgent even in this year when the pandemic, and the death of George Floyd and so many others, highlighted racial injustices in our community. The County was right to create a new position of Chief Race and Equity Officer to guide the development and implementation of important policies through a racial equity lens; a similar position is justified for environmental concerns. Accordingly, EcoAction Arlington joins with the Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission as well as Livability 22202 in recommending that the County create a high-level staff person to address environmental issues comprehensively and to resolve conflicts in County priorities with transparency and integrity while incorporating citizen participation at every opportunity. We ask that the County review the budget with an equity lens on environmental issues.

The need for such a comprehensive overview of environmental policy shows up in many places in the budget, but EcoAction Arlington requests that the County address three areas of environmental concern in the FY22 Budget and bridging over to the FY23 budget: 1) reverse proposed Staff cuts in FY22, and invest in more Staff as funds become available in FY23 to

achieve environmental goals; 2) reverse shortsighted cuts in FY22 to citizen engagement programs that help achieve environmental goals; and 3) in FY23 plan to roll out a deer management plan so that citizen efforts are not in vain.

Reverse AIRE Staff cuts and plan to increase Staff in FY23 to reverse environmental degradation. Low-wealth and minority communities are the first to be harmed by the lack of clean energy policies. Reducing funding for the **AIRE Staff** who are charged with implementing the ambitious Community Energy Plan is shortsighted and harmful. Our February 9, 2021 letter on the Community Energy Plan Implementation Framework offered numerous recommendations for revising the draft document to provide a roadmap to meeting the CEP goals for renewable energy and carbon neutrality. It identified priority initiatives that could be launched as revenues rebound and other funding becomes available.

Likewise, the County should make plans to add funds for a **second Forester** to address urban tree canopy in high density neighborhoods that most often suffer from lack of access to trees and biophilia benefits. Natural resources and tree canopy should rank equally high in County priorities as clean energy. As more funds become available, the County should add **electric vehicles** to the County fleet, increasing **energy efficiency** in low-wealth homes, and control the deer population (addressed further below).

Reverse funding cuts that hamper citizen engagement. The imperative to reduce carbon emissions, get to zero waste, and reduce stormwater runoff will require more than the County budget alone can deliver, and County leadership is crucial to mobilizing citizen participation to reach these targets. The County should budget for robust citizen education and participation in all environmental efforts. A preliminary report on residents' input to the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan indicates that Arlingtonians are "unique" in their readiness to participate as fully as possible in achieving County natural resource goals.¹

The proposed elimination of the **StormwaterWise** program is a step in the wrong direction. A revamped program, addressing concerns related to equity, should be part of the County's broader stormwater management plan. The County's plans to address stormwater runoff laudably call for substantial resources to increase the size of replacement pipes, but it is unclear what, if anything, is being proposed with respect to citizen reduction of stormwater on private property through nature-based solutions.

The elimination of funding for the **Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT)** as proposed in the budget would deprive the County of the opportunity to engage private citizens in environmental improvements that will have multiplier effects across programs. Rather than eliminating this funding the County should work harder to provide tax incentives to those who put their private land into this conservation trust. Arlington is the one of the few regional jurisdictions in Virginia not to do so.

Similarly, funding the **Virginia Cooperative Extension** empowers countless volunteer hours through EcoAction Arlington's signature program, Energy Masters, as well as through

¹ Recording of March 1, 2021 Arlington County Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group meeting at minutes 42 – 44, found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7SI_TKGqQM

Master Financial Educators, Master Gardeners, 4H afterschool programs and Arlington Regional Master Naturalists. This leveraging of funds is very much in keeping with the "Arlington Way." We are sincerely hoping that the County will find a way to restore this funding in the final budget. Removing this funding is a shortsighted reversal of the opportunity for citizen engagement in helping the County to meet its ambitious climate goals.

Prepare to safeguard County and private "Homegrown National Park" initiatives through deer control in FY23. The County should budget for robust citizen education and participation in all environmental efforts, taking seriously individual responsibility for restoring biodiversity via the tenets of a Douglas Tallamy's Homegrown National Park initiative (<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>). Citizen efforts to improve wildlife habitat, create rain gardens, and address stormwater with native plants will be for naught if the deer population is not brought under control. While it is gratifying that the County intends to survey the deer population, this is far from adequate to address their denuding the forests and spreading disease while eating the native plants necessary to reverse the insect apocalypse. The County should plan now so that the next County budget includes a plan to address the deer population in the same way as surrounding jurisdictions have done. It is well beyond time to address the deer overpopulation in Arlington for environmental reasons.

We appreciate how well and comprehensively Arlington has handled the crisis created by the COVID pandemic by increasing funding for Arlington Thrive and creating other programs and initiatives to ensure Arlington citizens are well cared for. We are proud to live in Arlington under your leadership and urge you to continue your dedication to our community so it may remain sustainable for future generations.

Sincerely,

/s/
Elenor Hodges, Executive Director
Jill M. Barker, Board Chair