



October 28, 2021

Arlington County Board Members

Mr. Matt de Ferranti, Chair

Ms. Libby Garvey

Ms. Katie Cristol

Mr. Christian Dorsey

Mr. Takis Karantonis

2100 Clarendon Blvd.

Arlington, VA 22201

Re: The Climate Crisis and FY 2023 Budget Direction to the County Manager

Dear Members of the Arlington County Board:

The world is experiencing a climate crisis and EcoAction Arlington urges the County Board to declare a climate emergency, develop a robust Climate Action Plan, and use its guidance to the County Manager for the FY 2023 Budget to put the County on a clear path to addressing this crisis. Despite the County Board's laudatory commitment to ambitious goals, the County is not backing these statements with needed actions. The Community Energy Plan, which has as its goal achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, is not sufficiently comprehensive or targeted on emissions reductions to serve as a climate action plan; the long awaited CEP Implementation Framework, moreover, is particularly disappointing as its various iterations fail to link strategies to carbon emissions reductions. Put more bluntly, it feels like our house is burning down and no one is noticing.

Climate change is already having a devastating impact on communities across the country and around the world. It seems not a day goes by without some news of climate-caused disasters--record cold in Texas knocking out power throughout the state, record heat in the Northwest, drought and unprecedented wildfires in many areas of the West, extensive damage to energy infrastructure due to Hurricane Ida, unprecedented flooding in Tennessee and the upper Midwest. We should not fool ourselves in Arlington that we are somehow immune from these kinds of impacts. According to a [Pennsylvania State and National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) collaborative product](#), "Arlington residents will face a worsening variety of weather- and climate-related hazards." The report's key messages, and recent events, include:

- Heavy downpours in Arlington have increased in frequency and intensity, causing property damage and poor water quality in local streams and the Chesapeake Bay. **Arlington can expect up to 45% more days of heavy rainfall (≥2 inches) by 2070.**
- Arlington’s summers are getting hotter. Compared to 1950, Arlington sees 10 more days per year in excess of 95°F. Human health [is] threatened by higher temperatures. **By 2070, Arlington can expect 27 to 77 days above 95°F every year, with associated increases in cooling costs and heat-related illnesses.**
- Over the last several years, Arlington has experienced multiple intense storms including a tornado that touched down in several North Arlington neighborhoods this summer and flooding that have damaged County infrastructure and business and residential properties. **Extreme weather events are expected to increase in frequency and intensity in Arlington in the coming years.**

Worsening impacts do not have to be inevitable, however. As the Sierra Club’s Emergency Mobilization Team notes, “communities throughout the world are declaring climate emergencies and forging ahead with local actions....business-as-usual is not an option.” Some of Arlington’s neighboring jurisdictions, in fact, have either heeded the Sierra Club’s call and declared climate emergencies (Alexandria City Council on Oct 22, 2019, Frederick, MD City Council on April 16, 2020, Frederick, MD County Council on July 21, 2020), or developed comprehensive climate action plans ([Montgomery County, MD](#) and [Fairfax County, VA](#)). It is time for Arlington to join their ranks in becoming more proactive.

**Won’t the Arlington County Board consider declaring a climate emergency now, updating the FY 23 Budget Direction to reflect this urgency, and committing the County to embarking on development of a comprehensive climate action plan?**

We recommend, specifically, that the County Board use the FY 23 Budget Direction to give higher priority to and expand the climate-related guidance. Currently, the [draft FY 23 Budget Direction](#) misses a key opportunity in the introductory section to make the connection between health, safety and housing with how a changing climate is impacting these basic needs. Not until the end are climate-related concerns introduced when the Board asks the County Manager to include “information and updates” and, “where relevant,” revenue and expenditures changes related to a ‘whole of government’ approach to achieving Arlington’s Climate Change and Sustainability goals--an acknowledgement without any specifics of the directive the County Board included in the FY 2022 Budget Guidance.

In addition to declaring a Climate Crisis--the purpose of which is to heighten urgency and accelerate action--we recommend the County back up this declaration with an appropriate response: providing funding for climate investments in the FY23 Budget and from American Rescue Plan Act and FY21 carryover funds. Critical investments include:

- Creating a Chief Sustainability Officer, as EcoAction Arlington recommended earlier this year;
- Expanding staffing in AIRE and targeted other units in the government to support programs that advance the County's climate goals. These would include:
  - Creating initiatives such as a Green Bank, Community Choice Aggregation (CCA), and a building retrofitting program that would advance renewable energy and carbon neutrality goals
  - Developing a plan to make County and APS facilities carbon neutral by 2040 in line with Fairfax County's commitment
  - Aligning County Master Plans and internal building and procurement policies with goals for addressing the climate emergency
  - Expanding AIRE's outreach efforts to residents and businesses to include offering information and resources for transitioning of homes, buildings, and operations to carbon neutral.
  - Committing to an updated CEP Implementation Framework that provides concrete, measurable goals tied to specific County initiatives and funding priorities.
- Providing significant funding to maintain, protect and expand Open Public Space as “natural capital.” Making such an investment will help redress environmental racism and help secure a livable world for future generations by increasing biodiversity, reducing the heat island effect, preserving mature trees that absorb more carbon dioxide than younger trees, as well as enhancing property values and reducing health problems for human beings.

All of the above actions would serve as elements of a comprehensive Climate Action Plan for Arlington, which we urge the Board to direct the County to begin preparing now.

EcoAction Arlington stands ready to support and encourage the County's efforts toward this important end.

Sincerely,

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