



March 23, 2022

The Honorable Katie Cristol, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Proposed FY 2023 Budget

Dear Chair Cristol:

In light of the global climate emergency, we urge the County Board to make climate action a top, whole of government priority and to direct spending toward programs and initiatives aimed at rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Arlington. The Arlington community received an 'Earth Day Gift' last year when you and your fellow Board members emphasized the need for a "whole of government" approach to climate change in your guidance to the County Manager for his development of the FY 2023 budget. While the proposed increase in funding for the Community Energy Plan (CEP) in the FY2023 budget is a step in the right direction, it falls far short of the level and scale of leadership needed to propel climate action at this critical time.

Adopt a True Whole of Government Approach

EcoAction Arlington urges the County Board to create a senior-level Chief Climate Officer empowered to put climate concerns at the forefront of every major decision, provide guidance to align county policies, plans, regulations, and procedures with the imperatives of quickly reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and develop and implement new programs and initiatives to promote the necessary transformations throughout the Arlington community.

The draft budget states that the County is employing a whole of government approach, but the specifics do not substantiate this assertion. The draft budget describes the AIRE Team as responsible for integrating the CEP across other County departments, programs, plans and services, but it doesn't acknowledge AIRE's limited clout given its relatively lower-level position in the government hierarchy and its sole focus on energy. Climate leadership must also encompass forestry, natural resources, solid waste, stormwater, parks, public schools, as well as energy to achieve maximum carbon emission reductions and make Arlington more climate resilient. We applaud the budget increase and the modest staffing increases for AIRE and related DES programs that will help with energy integration. Essential components of a successful whole of government approach, however, are missing: a staffing model, budget projections, metrics and plans for integrating sustainability into the County's plans and policies, along with a communications strategy.

The experiences of other jurisdictions, including the District of Columbia and Montgomery County, demonstrate that adoption and implementation of successful climate action plans require a whole of government approach with an executive-level administrator.

Plan Additional Investments in Climate Action

We are encouraged that the proposed FY 2023 budget includes climate change and the environment as a priority and expands spending to address current challenges. The addition of two new positions, expansion of the County's EV fleet and infrastructure, and exploration of rooftop solar on County buildings are laudable. We also welcome the proposed \$1 million CEP Action Fund as a down payment on Arlington's sustainability goals, although we recommend that the budget be more specific regarding how the funds will be spent to advance greenhouse gas reductions. In addition to focusing on County projects, funding is also needed to promote changes in the private sector, which accounts for 96 percent of the County's greenhouse gas emissions.

The County needs to **propose spending in the FY 2023 budget that links to urgently-needed reductions in our carbon footprint.** Examples include:

- Prioritizing comprehensive building retrofit pilots targeted to low- to moderate-income households and underserved communities to improve energy efficiency; electrify HVAC systems, hot water heaters, and appliances; and install rooftop solar and EV-charging infrastructure. The County Board should consider using remaining ARPA funds to launch such an initiative while the County seeks additional funding from federal, RGGI, and other sources.
- Developing programs to educate, engage, encourage, inspire and assist the private sector and the public to meet our urgent climate goals.
- Embracing electrification and elimination of fossil fuel use as an essential climate action strategy for all County Government facilities and vehicles as well as in public engagement initiatives. We were pleased to note, for example, the planned conversion of gasoline-powered to battery-powered electric hand tools used for county maintenance. "Return on investment" for all new County facilities should include what our County dollars can buy in terms of carbon emission reductions and not just dollar cost-savings. The current volatility in energy prices and supplies further highlights the downsides of continued reliance on fossil fuels.
- Using nature-based solutions to address climate change. Increased funding for invasive plant removal is an inexpensive method to protect our existing tree canopy and natural areas, which sequester carbon, filter pollution, and reduce the urban heat island effect. Likewise, a current tree canopy survey is long overdue to guide the County in quantifying and justifying measures to abate excessive tree destruction in Arlington.

We hope this input is received in the spirit in which it is given, i.e., with our sincere desire that Arlington leaders stand prominently with leaders across the region in securing a cleaner, healthier environment for our community and country.

Sincerely,

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

cc: Arlington County Board Members