March 23, 2023

The Honorable Christian Dorsey, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Proposed FY 2024 Budget

Dear Chair Dorsey:

We are grateful for the County's continued support of EcoAction Arlington. However, we feel that Arlington's response to the unfolding climate crisis, as reflected in the FY 2024 Proposed Budget, is at best timid. In fact, the County appears to be backtracking from commitments made last year, with many key details lacking and ***the overall AIRE budget being reduced by 8% and the second position for the new Office of Climate Coordination and Policy being eliminated***. Project funding for the $1 million Community Energy Plan implementation fund has been slow to materialize.

- The 2022 Community Energy Plan road map repeatedly notes the lack of staff resources as a barrier for implementing many of its strategies.
- ***The FY24 budget should restore the second position in the Climate Office and allot sufficient funding for staff or contractors to initiative programs that will put Arlington on track to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to meet the imperative of a 50 percent reduction by 2030.***

The recent hiring of the new head of the Office of Climate Coordination and Policy is an important step toward a whole of government approach to addressing climate change. We also applaud the initiatives during fiscal year 2024 of the Department of Environmental Services to transition its sedan fleet to EVs, identify solar-ready rooftops on County facilities, and support the development of an EV charging infrastructure on public properties. The opening of the Maplewood solar farm earlier this year has advanced Arlington's goal for meeting County government electricity needs with renewable energy by two years, an early indication of the financial payoffs of climate action.

Notably lacking from the budget is funding to advance reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in County and private sector buildings and public transportation. Building on recommendations from our letter last year, EcoAction Arlington urges the County Board to support efforts critical climate actions solutions by:

- Ensuring that funding is available to support transition to zero emissions buses for ART as existing buses reach end of life and the new ART Bus Operations and Maintenance Facility is operational—delaying

transition to zero emission buses undermines the County's carbon neutrality goal and continues to expose vulnerable populations to pollutants from compressed natural gas (CNG) buses.

- 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.
- 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 as opportunities arise. The County has identified only one project, the Cultural Affairs Building, for an electrification pilot, and the budget includes funding for assessments for potential electrification in two additional facilities. With nine facilities under design and construction during FY24, additional opportunities would seem likely although details remain opaque and aligns with County Board guidance for the FY2023-32 CIP.

EcoAction Arlington urges the County Board to invest the $2.6 million in savings in electricity costs from its virtual power purchase agreement into climate actions. In addition, the County should make every effort to secure federal and other funding to support transitioning Arlington away from fossil fuels to a clean energy future and assist residents and property owners in tapping into available credits, rebates, and financing**.** EcoAction Arlington would be an enthusiastic partner in promoting initiatives that will reduce the carbon footprint and energy costs of Arlington residents.

Addressing climate change is a complex process and requires both a whole of government and whole of community approach, but bold and immediate action is critical. The recently published IPPC report concluded that "*There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence).* As the keynote speaker at our recent 45th annual meeting noted, climate change threatens the health and wellbeing of our families and children. Addressing climate change on the other hand will contribute to better health, energy savings, cleaner air and water, and stronger communities.

We may not have the power to prevent the catastrophic storms like those 2022 brought us, but it is within our power to steer our County resources to fully fund our own plans and provide the wherewithal to see them through. We look to County Board members to do everything within their power to take action to prevent the worst impacts of climate change and help build a sustainable and livable future for our families and future generations by prioritizing funding for these essential programs.

Sincerely

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Elenor Hodges, Executive Director
Jenn Yates, Chair of the Board of Directors

cc: Arlington County Board Members