

2023 County Board Primary Candidates Questionnaire: Climate Change and Sustainability

Name:

1. *Addressing Climate Change* In its March 20 report, the International Panel on Climate Change stated “There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence).” The scientific consensus is that GHG emissions must be reduced by 50% by 2030 to avoid the worst consequences of climate change. As a County Board member what policies and initiatives would you pursue to ensure that Arlington rapidly reduces its GHG emissions?

In 2019 Arlington County updated its [Community Energy Plan \(CEP\)](#), mandating net zero carbon emissions by 2050. While I support this ambitious goal, it is prescriptive rather than pragmatic. For example, the chart on page 19 of the CEP indicates that the County plans to achieve net zero through:

- reduction/elimination of fossil generated electricity,
- increased reliance on renewable energy,
- more energy efficient buildings, and
- EV transportation initiatives.

All of these objectives are arguably achievable. However there’s another category in the chart that posits a 14 percent reduction in GHG emissions between 2030 and 2050 through “Future Opportunities to Achieve Carbon Neutrality.” This is purely aspirational and has no place in a concrete plan.

[Arlington County deserves credit for entering into a virtual power purchase agreement \(VPPA\) with Dominion](#) by purchasing energy offsets from power generated at Dominion’s solar farm near Danville, VA (p.42). But those offsets apply only to emissions generated by county government operations. Virginia’s mandatory renewable energy portfolio standard is not aggressive enough to incentivize Dominion to produce renewable energy on a

scale that would offset countywide emissions. Although the Virginia Clean Economy Act permits localities to enter into third party power purchase agreements for renewable energy, the scope of these agreements is too small to meet GHG reduction targets. Further the CEP's Roadmap for Arlington County cites "lack of competition in the VA renewable energy marketplace" as a barrier to meeting Arlington's renewable energy targets (p. 42).

If elected, I will stop misleading the public about the potential for net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Rather I will lobby the legislature to adopt a more robust mandatory renewable energy portfolio standard.

I will also vigorously oppose Governor Youngkin's bid to exit Virginia from participation in the the mid-Atlantic Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

I will increase AIRE (Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy) funds to retrofit homes of qualified low and moderate income residents.

Finally I will insist that the County get serious about preserving its mature tree canopy coverage, which according to a recent report by the [Green Infrastructure Center, is only 33 percent.](#) (p. 12), down from a 2017 County estimate of 41 percent.

Having clearcut more than 1,000 trees from public property in the last two decades, Arlington ignores the benefit of mature trees at its peril. Not only does tree canopy serve as an invaluable carbon sink, it is also the first line of defense against flooding.

- 2. Sustainable Development How would you advance urban development in Arlington that supports less energy intensive lifestyles and helps advance our housing affordability goals while protecting tree canopy, providing equitable access to open spaces and nature, and effectively managing stormwater runoff?*

If elected, I will urge the Board to scrap the recently adopted Missing Middle ordinance as a sop to developers that will not redress the effects of redlining and will not provide starter homes for most moderate income residents. Instead it will inflate land values and real estate taxes; drive out existing minority residents; accelerate gentrification of Arlington neighborhoods, and exacerbate flooding and tree canopy loss. In fact [Anne Bodine of Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future reports that](#): “Green Valley, the largest of [the County’s Black] neighborhoods, went from being 60% Black in 2000 to 23% in 2020 [due to Missing Middle style densification]. The County and its supporters have never explained how expanding the same zoning will yield different results.”

To meet the threat of Missing Middle head on, I propose to convene a task force of stakeholders, including neighborhood civic associations and local architects and economists to consider an alternative zoning scheme released by the Laboratory for Architecture in a 12 point plan in January, 2023.

This plan would rezone the county neighborhood by neighborhood rather than wholesale, using a floor area ratio approach to determine allowable density. Unlike the current Missing Middle ordinance, affordable housing would be incentivized by awarding bonus density to developers providing such units.

I also want the County to:

- Invest in community land trusts,
- Promote office to residential building conversions (O2R), and
- restore the partial tax credit for renovation of multi-family dwellings, which it repealed in 2021.

3. *Decarbonization of Transportation* Transportation accounts for almost 40 percent of Arlington's GHG emissions and contributes to poor air quality and congestion. What would be your plan for creating more sustainable transportation options that would sharply reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles with shifts to biking, transit, and zero emission vehicles?

As a former member of the Transportation Commission and avid cyclist, I can't say good enough about ART Bus. But ART Bus needs improvement. First, ART's fleet is powered by natural gas (CNG), when it should run on electricity. According to the County's Transportation Capital Plan fund summary in the [Proposed FY 2024 Budget](#), 15 of 78 ART CNG buses will be retired in FY 2024, but only 4 of their replacements will be battery electric buses (BEB) (p. 823). Arlington can do better. All of the replacements should be fossil free alternatives.

Second, ART's ridership on most bus routes on nights and weekends is lacking. A lot of ART buses ride empty throughout the day. This may be a welcome convenience to the solo rider like me, but it's a waste of taxpayers' money. The solution is not to pull the plug on ART. The solution is a sustained advertising campaign, pointing out that a SmarTrip card on a transit alternative will get you there faster and cheaper than a fill up.

I applaud [APS' recent decision to fully subsidize student fares on ART buses](#) via SmarTrip cards, because it will provide a guaranteed ridership for a number of ART bus

routes. This will assure ART's viability until the parents of APS students are ready to do the math on transit use.

One of the standards implemented in the Green Buildings Incentive Policy (GBP) is [4% EV charging stations and 15% EV-ready spaces](#) in site plan projects (p. 8).

If elected I will up the ante to 10% EV charging stations and 25% EV-ready spaces.