2025 County Board Candidates Questionnaire

This February, the County Board adopted a [Climate Action Resolution](#) that calls for a whole-of-government, whole-of-community comprehensive energy and environmental strategy to address the climate crisis. With the federal government retrenching from its climate commitments and state actions stagnating in recent years, local action is critical to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building more resilient communities. County Board members will be expected to lead efforts to mitigate and adapt to these changing conditions. To assist voters in assessing how candidates will advance the County's climate goals for carbon neutrality, resiliency in the face or more extreme weather, and protection and enhancement of tree canopy coverage and natural resources, EcoAction Arlington and Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions request that you complete this questionnaire, which we will share with our membership and the public at large, by Friday, September 19.

Instructions - Please provide your name and answer to each question below and email to office@ecoactionarlington.org.

Name: **Carlos "DC" De Castro Pretelt**

1. With Arlington already experiencing higher temperatures and more erratic rainfall (both heavy rains and weeks-long drought), the need to rapidly phase out fossil fuels, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and shift to more environmentally sustainable lifestyles is critical. What three strategies would you pursue to accelerate the County's transition to a carbon neutral community? How would you ensure that everyone in Arlington benefits from this transition while addressing past inequities that disproportionately burden disadvantaged communities with the environmental impacts?

   Answer: I believe the path to a carbon-neutral future must be rooted in three guiding strategies: collaboration, innovation, and inclusion.

First, we need to work hand-in-hand with our community—residents, businesses, and regional partners—to develop climate solutions that are both ambitious and achievable. Arlington is already experiencing the effects of climate change, but no plan can succeed unless people feel they have a voice in it.

Second, we should embrace innovation, making it easier for families and businesses to adopt cleaner technologies, support sustainable development, and promote transportation options that reduce our reliance on fossil fueled modes of conveyance.

Third, this transition must be inclusive. We have to ensure that all neighborhoods share in the benefits—whether it's cleaner air or lower utility costs—and that historically disadvantaged communities are prioritized when it comes to investments and protections. Addressing inequities is how we build a stronger and more resilient Arlington.

2. In July, the County Board adopted the [vision and goals](#) for the updated Master Transportation Plan, calling for a transportation future when "***People of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities can move safely, comfortably, and seamlessly in Arlington. Everyone can rely on a variety of high-quality, sustainable transportation options to get them where they want to go, when they need to be there, with desirable choices beyond using a car***." What strategies would you pursue and how would you prioritize investment to advance this vision and to decarbonize the transportation sector, which currently accounts for about 36 percent of Arlington's greenhouse gas emissions?

   Answer: If we are serious about reducing emissions and creating a system that truly works for everyone, we need to make smart, data-driven decisions that reflect the realities of how people actually move through Arlington.

   First, I believe we should use data to better understand travel patterns and identify where the greatest needs and opportunities lie—

whether it's expanding lighting along walking routes, improving bike infrastructure, or strengthening public transit connections. Data can help us target investments where they will deliver the greatest impact, both in reducing emissions and in improving daily life for residents.

Second, we should embrace innovative, community-centric ideas. A transportation plan will only succeed if the community feels ownership of it. By combining data-driven planning with inclusive engagement, we can prioritize investments that make Arlington safer for pedestrians, healthier, and more sustainable—ensuring our transportation initiatives serve every resident.

3. Arlington continues to face significant development in residential and commercial sectors. While new buildings can be more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable, the tear down of existing structures have significant climate impacts and community displacement. Given private developers rights and significant leeway in choosing how to develop land parcels, if elected, what specific solutions and policies to the county's residential and commercial development would you endorse that best aligns with the County's climate goals and vision for a resilient and equitable community?

   Answer: Arlington's growth brings both opportunities and challenges. New development can support our climate goals, but we must balance progress with stewardship of our neighborhoods, our environment, and our sense of community.

   I believe the path forward lies in three principles: best practices, smart planning, and thoughtful redevelopment. First, we should encourage best practices in green building so that new projects meet the highest standards for energy efficiency and sustainability. This helps us lower emissions while reducing long-term costs for residents and businesses alike.

   Second, our decisions should be grounded in data-driven land use planning. By understanding where growth can occur most

effectively—near transit, jobs, and existing infrastructure—we can ensure new developments account for mobility and livability.

Finally, smart redevelopment means preserving tree cover, open space, and the character of our neighborhoods, while making better use of the land we have. We need to grow in ways that protect what makes Arlington special, ensuring that the benefits of growth—jobs, housing, and public spaces—are shared broadly and equitably.

4. Arlington's tree canopy and green spaces have been significantly diminished by rapid development, while stormwater impacts from impervious surfaces are increasingly severe. Site development, whether commercial or residential, usually results in clear cut lots and limited replacement of mature shade trees. The Forestry and Natural Resources Plan, adopted in 2023, calls for restoration of a 40% tree canopy cover and overall improvement in our natural resources. What "new" approaches are needed to reverse the tree loss trends and gain the greater climate resilience benefits that mature tree canopies provide, particularly in Arlington's more disadvantaged neighborhoods?

Answer: Arlington's tree canopy is essential for our quality of life, our resilience to climate change, and the character of our neighborhoods. I believe the way forward is to treat trees as critical infrastructure—planning development in ways that preserve mature canopy wherever possible, investing in restoration where we've lost ground, and ensuring that all neighborhoods, especially those historically underserved, share the benefits. By pairing smart redevelopment with community partnerships, and using data to track canopy loss and recovery, we can make meaningful progress toward the County's goals, while building a greener, healthier Arlington for everyone. Additionally, we should also explore other solutions to stormwater resilience and novel approaches, beyond tree cover.

5. In the US (and Arlington is typical) over 4.5 pounds of trash per person per day is generated and 30 percent of food produced is

never eaten: this waste contributes to a significant portion of GHG emissions, exacerbates environmental pollution, and increases demand for water and other scarce resources. What steps can Arlington take to reduce this waste and promote reuse, effective recycling, and the transition to a circular economy that meets its aspiration for a zero-waste community?

Answer: Reducing waste starts with personal responsibility towards changing daily habits, but that can only happen when the right information is available and greener options are readily accessible. Arlington can support this shift by making reuse and recycling more convenient, expanding access to low- and zero-waste alternatives, and working with the community to build a culture where sustainable choices are the simplest choices. By focusing on both access and awareness, we can move closer to a true zero-waste future.

6. Gas-powered leaf blowers create excessive noise which exceeds Arlington's noise ordinance, and has been associated with numerous health impacts, particularly with vulnerable workers. But anyone in close proximity, including homes, also suffer. In addition, these machines emit excessively high levels of greenhouse gas and other pollutants. Alternatives are readily available including quieter battery electric blowers, an old-fashioned raking, or just leaving leaves and other plant litter to decompose and mulch where they lie. Nearby jurisdictions have begun banning, including D.C., Montgomery County, and most recently Alexandria City. What is your position on gas-powered leaf blowers, and what steps should Arlington take?

Answer: I fully support Arlington's transition away from gas-powered leaf blowers. These machines harm workers' health, create excessive neighborhood noise, and generate disproportionate emissions. The good news is we don't need to reinvent the wheel—nearby jurisdictions like Montgomery County, D.C., and Alexandria have

already moved in this direction, and Arlington can collaborate and leverage their lessons learned to design a fair, workable plan.

That means setting a clear timeline for implementation, while also looking at ways to increase the cost of use for gas blowers—ensuring that large operators are encouraged to shift more quickly, while protecting small landscaping businesses and workers from being unfairly burdened.