

2025 County Board Candidates Questionnaire

Name Bob Cambridge

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?

Response of Bob Cambridge.

I certainly do not oppose the initiatives that result in adoption of newer technologies where they can be adopted. The ART bus adoption of natural gas and other technologies in the fleet gives us the opportunity to better learn in detail both the benefits and the disadvantages of the technology.

While I do not necessarily agree with all assumptions set forth in the presentation of the question, I do agree that not fully understanding nature leaves us vulnerable to surprises and unintended consequences. The better perspective is to adopt proposed transitions while continuing to observe the results with an open mind to the very real possibility that there are a lot of things we still do not fully understand or control. I do regret that many environmental initiatives I have seen in my 42 years in Arlington have not been fully implemented because of the all too common reality that many of us have other priorities that prevent initiatives from being accomplished in the manner envisioned when the program was designed. Education can mitigate that effect but not eliminate it. We should continue to study, for example, efficiency of our trash collection and disposal efforts to continuously find better methods and procedures.

I fully appreciate the benefits both environmental and aesthetic of Arlington's tree canopy and I am disappointed at the sight of many of our trees dying because of improper placement such as placement too close to roads salted to address ice and snow or placement in areas far too circumscribed by roads and sidewalks to allow the tree to thrive. Compare roadside trees in Falls Church to the trees along side of the 3700 block of Langston Boulevard. Very disappointing is the apparent practice of planting a tree, having it die, and replacing it with another tree that also dies. I have seen just that over three times each involving tree sites in the referenced 3700 block of Langston Boulevard. It was a waste of limited resources and effort, effort better directed to saving beautiful trees overwhelmed by invasive ivy.

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?

Response of Bob Cambridge.

I happen to have received a Senior Fare Card, similar to a Metro Senior SmarTrip card, that allows me to ride on Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) busses and subways for free. I use that transportation system almost exclusively when visiting Philadelphia and am even predisposed to use Amtrak rather than drive to Philly because of that benefit. A similar initiative to divert more to use of WMATA and ART options would have the effect of more use of the ART and Metro systems which are environmentally preferable to heavy auto traffic. Also, once you find the best way to use those systems, you tend to become hooked. I much prefer riding and reading in comfort to driving.

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?

Response of Bob Cambridge.

It has been the County's practice to negotiate with developers to achieve agreement by the developer to, for example, incorporate affordable housing in the development in return for waiver of zoning or other restrictions that the County is able to impose. My less than comprehensive review of such instances suggests that agreed to developer modifications are not always realized when the project is completed. Where there is compliance, there is still less, for example affordable housing, than is needed. I do not pretend that I have a solution for every problem, but I do know where useful information is to be found. I am one. The citizens of Arlington are almost ¼ million. Lots of good ideas out there. The problem is how to get to them. Kind of off the cuff, but I note that comments to posts in neighborhood list serves, other social media, and ARLnow articles often contain interesting perspectives and suggestions. I would like to see an AI driven review trolling those sources to see what pops out.

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?

Response of Bob Cambridge.

There might be an advantage to granting tax benefits for not clear cutting, offset by savings in mitigation of the damage caused by clear cutting. There is also a reality that trees do add to the value of a property, particularly mature trees.

There must be studies that show how broadleaf trees to the south of a property cool in summer and do not block warming sunlight in winter, resulting in some savings in heating and cooling costs. Such information should be included in sales information for the relevant properties. The experience of developers who understand and have benefitted from that knowledge could be more widely disseminated to the developer community. Again, disseminate that information by highlighting the experience of developers who have been able to benefit from it.

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?

Response of Bob Cambridge.

Reduction of waste and promotion of reuse can occur both before and after collection. After, Arlington is in control of the processes and focus on technological advances should take us in a favorable direction. Before, there is the daunting task of changing citizen's habits. Mary and I enjoy visits from deer, foxes, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, birds, and other local critters. Excess food goes on the back yard where the critters dispose of it for us and the lawn seems to benefit from that interaction. I do not know if that makes any difference in GHG emissions, environmental pollution, or demand for water. If it does, the County can perhaps better support citizen organizations' efforts, particularly if it can be shown that such efforts lower the cost of County efforts.

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 suffers. In addition, these machines emit excessively high levels of greenhouse gas and other pollutants. Alternatives are readily available including quieter battery electric blowers, and 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?

Response of Bob Cambridge.

Noise pollution that exceeds an ordinance only needs enforcement. As a member of the Arlington Police Department noted in a recent meeting of the Cherrydale Citizens Association, there is a procedure for making complaints, and it is detail that makes the difference. If APD knows violations occur at a specific time and place, they can have their limited officer time directed to that place and time. Otherwise, the resource is simply not available. Having the officer personally observe the violation is apparently limiting them. Seems to be an evidentiary issue. The complainant is also a witness. What is missing is a record of the noise for which a formal foundation can be made. If the complainant is sufficiently motivated, the County or citizens groups can possibly provide training in how best to collect and support the evidence. The preceding is an off the cuff response. I bet there are lots of better responses. They will come if they do, not from me, but from us. I see lots of effort to engage the community in these undertakings and the effort should continue. But more alone is rarely enough. How about engagement in solicitation of ideas in addition to engagement in compliance? We are not using the resource represented by our population nearly as fully as is possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions and the opportunity to put in my two cents worth. I invite comment directed to bcesq@verizon.net. If nothing else, I will certainly learn something and we might even come up with good ideas.