



October 15, 2025

Honorable Takis Karantonis, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Green Building Incentive Policy Update

Dear Chair Karantonis:

EcoAction Arlington, Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, and Sierra Club Potomac River Group greatly appreciated the opportunity to participate in a staff-sponsored stakeholders' roundtable in late August to discuss the County's planned update to Green Building Incentive Policy (GBIP). We found the roundtable discussions to be frank and informative, giving us better insight into the perspectives and challenges faced by builders.

An updated GBIP proposal should be clear on its objectives and how it will support the County's goal of carbon neutrality. Linking the GBIP requirements more directly to reducing the County's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other environmental goals, while simultaneously accounting for builders' constraints and concerns, offers the best path toward creating an effective program to decarbonize our built environment. As addressed in our separate letter, updates to the Site Plan Conditions are also essential in establishing a minimal floor consistent with the County's energy goals.

We offer the following suggestions for the County to consider in formulating a new GBIP.

Simplify the GBIP Requirements

To streamline individual requirements without compromising sustainability objectives, an updated GBIP should include the following for a building to earn bonus density:

- Incorporate the newly-implemented LEED version 5.0. This version of LEED is much more focused on energy efficiency, life-cycle carbon emissions, and other factors needed for building decarbonization that are separate requirements under the current GBIP.
- Require compliance with certain individual LEED criteria crucial to the County's climate goals, including those related to energy performance, electrification, and reduced carbon materials.
- Require documentation to ensure projects awarded bonus density perform as promised.
- Grant higher bonus density without any additional requirements for buildings that have obtained high-level certification such as Zero Carbon from the International Living Futures Institute or PHIUS Zero from the Passive House Institute US (PHIUS). These certifications align fully with the County's climate goals.
- Allow additional bonus density for buildings that deploy sustainable technologies such as geothermal systems, grid optimization measures, 100 percent EV-ready parking, backup batteries, and large reductions in embodied carbon.

Introduce Additional Incentives

Under the current GBIP, builders have not sought the higher levels of bonus density, evidently because the costs involved in achieving those higher levels outweigh the financial benefits. However, builders have expressed interest in obtaining tax and other financial incentives in exchange for achieving more ambitious sustainability targets. We recommend that the County consider a real estate tax incentive program for projects achieving energy performance targets considerably higher than baseline requirements and/or full electrification. For example, the City of Fairfax's proposed [green building policy](#) includes a real estate tax abatement incentive of 50 percent for buildings that meet certain targets.

To achieve County goals, existing buildings' energy performance must be improved. Adaptive reuse projects and buildings undergoing major retrofits should also be eligible for these incentives. Projects previously approved but not yet built might also increase their energy efficiency commitments in order to qualify for tax incentives.

Expedited Approval Process

We also encourage the County to examine its current processes for approving and permitting these projects and consider offering expedited processing for projects that align with the County's key priorities, such as climate action, affordable housing, stormwater management, and tree canopy coverage. During our roundtable discussion, builders pointed to numerous regulations and time-consuming processes that added to the cost of their projects. An approach that encourages builders to treat County priorities holistically rather than as competing community benefits while reducing their costs could be a win-win for them and the Community.

Thank you for the opportunity to convey our views concerning this very important plan update. As the County continues to move forward with updating the GBIP, we strongly encourage staff to continue to engage with all stakeholders to design a program that meets the County's climate goals and recognizes the business and financial realities of developers and building owners.

We stand ready to work with the County to make this successful.

Sincerely,

/s/_____

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Executive Director, EcoAction Arlington

Julie Rosenberg
Leader, Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Arlington Hub

Dean Amel
Chair, Sierra Club - Potomac River Group

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