

**Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission
c/o Department of Environmental Services
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705
Arlington, VA 22201**

October 25, 2021

The Honorable Matt de Ferranti
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Declaration of Climate Emergency and Guidance on the Arlington County FY2023 Budget

Dear Chair de Ferranti:

It is time for Arlington to decisively confront the painfully apparent crisis of climate change in our community. Addressing the climate crisis is urgent, solutions are complex, and action across the board is critical for Arlington to reach its goals. Crafting a strong declaration of a climate emergency on behalf of Arlington County and creating a budget that reflects the importance of addressing the climate emergency are important steps in this process.

The C2E2 Commission calls on the Arlington County Board to issue a formal declaration of local emergency in response to the climate change crisis and prioritize its upcoming FY2023 budget to reflect the strategic investments, policies, and regulations required to address the emergency and its impact on our community.

DECLARING A CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY IN ARLINGTON COUNTY

Climate change has already devastated lives across the world, and a strong declaration of a climate emergency would be a substantive and appropriate way to respond to this massive issue. This past year has shown a small taste of the horrors climate change will bring to human civilization. This summer, a “[heat dome](#)” covered the Pacific Northwest, leading to hundreds of deaths and killing billions of organisms in natural ecosystems. In addition, the island of Sicily was subjected to temperatures up to [119 degrees](#), the highest ever recorded in Europe, while roughly 200 people died in Germany due to [intense flooding](#).

Arlington itself is being affected by the devastation of climate change. According to the [EPA](#), Virginia’s average temperatures rose by roughly one degree over the last century leading to increased flooding, erosion of coastal areas, and extreme heat waves. Sadly, the negative impacts of climate change will not be distributed equally. Communities of color, low-income communities, and immigrants will [disproportionately](#) suffer from the extreme heat waves and weather due to the systemic racism that impacts our community and our country.

Communities in our area have already taken this step. We urge Arlington to join [Alexandria](#), [Richmond](#), and Maryland’s [Montgomery County](#), and [Frederick](#) in declaring a climate change

emergency. Overall, more than 2,000 jurisdictions worldwide have committed to climate emergency declarations. Arlington must be next.

Arlington’s Local Declaration of Climate Emergency should contain four key components:

- Affirm that climate change is happening, that it is caused by human activity, and that it represents an existential threat to our survival as a species
- Commit to key funding and allocation of County resources needed both to counter the County’s contribution to and mitigation of the worst impacts over an established timeline
- Explicitly reference the impact climate change will have on the County’s most marginalized communities and resolve to prioritize actions to mitigate these effects
- Communicate and engage with the public on understanding the climate crisis and how we as a community can respond

FY23 BUDGET PRIORITIES AND THE CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY

C2E2 acknowledges the tremendous and unprecedented challenges the County faced in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the County’s operational budget for FY2022 and planning for FY2023. Moving forward, the resilience of our communities is reliant upon urban planning that anticipates the intersectional challenges stemming from concurrent public health and climate crises and directs revenue accordingly. As revenue stabilizes this year, we urge the County Board and County Manager to maximize the funding opportunities from the federal and state governments created to address these unprecedented circumstances.

With respect to the American Rescue Plan Act funds, we were disappointed that the County Board’s draft direction to the County Manager did not include climate funding in its recommendations. While the projects identified are laudable, we urge the County to pursue American Rescue Plan Act funds for specific climate projects. In particular, [financing energy efficiency upgrades for low-income residences](#) is a missed opportunity that would fall within the scope of the County’s affordable housing priorities.

C2E2 acknowledges and appreciates a number of priorities included in the draft County Board’s direction to the County Manager for the FY 2023 Budget to enhance the County’s climate resilience. In particular, we support the priorities of the County’s Framework for Racial Equity, the stormwater utility fee, and especially the “whole of government” approach to achieving Arlington’s Climate Change and Sustainability goals. We urge the County Board to build on these elements to provide clear direction for the next budget year to address the climate emergency.

We believe the following recommendations for the FY2023 County Budget are necessary components for meeting that “whole of government” approach:

1. Establish a permanent position in the County Manager’s Office of “Chief Climate Change and Sustainability Officer” (C3SO)

As currently organized, we believe that the County government’s climate and sustainability goals are not fully internalized by the staff who have the greatest ability to implement them. This situation is partly because the County’s energy and climate

change-related work is managed and championed from a single, lower-tier unit. The Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy (AIRE) resides relatively low on the government's organizational chart (below an office director, department director, and deputy county manager), arguably limiting its influence on other departments.

2. Incorporate Community Energy Plan Criteria in All Planning

The success of the County's sustainability efforts is threatened by a lack of specifics. To that end, we make two recommendations. We urge the County Board to: 1) declare a climate emergency and then leverage this declaration to direct the entire government to prioritize consideration of CEP goals (explicitly to include electrification) in all significant procurement and expenditure processes; and 2) direct the County Manager to develop a specific timeline for the County Government to make the transition to carbon neutrality.

3. Increase AIRE Staff and Funding

We respectfully reiterate our concern that despite its well-earned reputation as a leader on environmental sustainability, Arlington County is now lagging on actions to implement its sustainability and climate change mitigation goals. Staffing and funding of the AIRE team over the last several years declined. As a result, AIRE is now less-resourced to take on the actions needed to support a "whole of government approach" and promote community-wide transformation.

4. Catch Up Investment in Electric Vehicle Fleet

We note that the significant \$6 million budget surplus in the automotive equipment fund is largely due to unfulfilled plans to update the fleet. The time to invest in a feasible electric vehicle transition strategy is now.

5. Promote Energy Equity

We likewise recommend prioritizing budget allocations and directives that address the disproportionate impact of climate change on historically disadvantaged, vulnerable communities. A demonstration project, using ARPA funding, to retrofit affordable housing units to improve energy efficiency, support transition away from natural gas systems to energy-efficient electric equivalents, and install solar panels should be a top priority.

6. Expand Outreach and Education on Climate Solutions

Similar to the Car-Free Diet program, and ultimately on a comparable scale, the AIRE program should expand public education and outreach efforts. These efforts should inform residents and businesses on steps they can take to reduce their carbon footprint while saving money and improving comfort. Further, the efforts should facilitate access to available programs and funding sources.

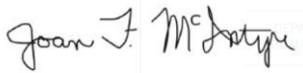
7. Protect Tree Canopy and Manage Stormwater

The County should continue to prioritize its investment in protecting Arlington's tree canopy on public lands through improved maintenance and invasive removal. The County should also direct one-time ARPA and FY 2021 close-out funds to stormwater management, flood mitigation, and stream restoration projects. Adequate funding of each of these efforts is vital to environmental equity in the County.

Our collective action is required to meet this unprecedented crisis. We look forward to continuing our work with the County Board and staff to meet this challenge with increased urgency.

To that end, we appreciate your urgent consideration of these recommendations.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan F. McIntyre". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Joan McIntyre
Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

CC: Arlington County Board
Mr. Mark Schwartz, County Manager