

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

c/o Department of Environmental Services 2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705 Arlington, VA 22201

March 27, 2017

The Honorable Jay Fisette, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

Subject: Comment on County Manager's FY2018 Proposed Budget

Dear Chair Fisette:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the County Manager's proposed FY18 budget. When the initial budget was released in February, we were generally supportive of the budget, which seemed to reflect the County's priorities on sustainability issues. We are concerned that the proposed alternative budget, which features an option to reduce the tax rate by one cent, sacrifices important community resources and is counter to the County's recognized leadership on environmental and energy issues. Given the proposed federal cuts to energy and environmental programs, it is even more important that the County preserves and strengthens its existing programs. **We ask that the County Board reject the one cent tax rate reduction**, and preserve funding for the following:

- Environmental Management position in DES: Elimination of this position would be a major setback to the implementation of the Community Energy Plan (CEP). Arlington needs staff resources to support climate inventories, Energy Star benchmarking, and energy efficiency measures. **This cut would result in a total reduction of 2.5 FTEs, or more than 25%, from the Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy (AIRE) program over the last 3 budget cycles.** The cumulative impacts of these decisions will put CEP implementation in danger.
- Enhanced streetlight program: Operational streetlights are a basic county service essential to street safety and visibility for all modes of travel. A strong streetlight program with reasonable repair response times (e.g., 3 days instead of 30 days) is critical to encouraging more walking and cycling and preventing road accidents caused by poor visibility. We ask that the Board preserve the five additional streetlight personnel positions and two vehicle additions. We also support the trail light assessment because it recognizes that many people use trails for commuting, including in the winter months when it is dark by late afternoon.
- Priority snow-clearing for high-volume multi-use trails: As a county, it is important that we support walking, cycling, and transit as alternatives to personal vehicle use. Cutting snow-clearing on high-volume trails sends the opposite message.
- One-time \$2 million funding for land acquisition: The County's Natural Resources Management Plan has long called for the acquisition of County-owned open space to

preserve the County's threatened natural resources. By allocating sufficient funds for land acquisition, including those designated for open space and other non-park use, it reduces overall pressures to develop on park land and natural lands. Land acquisition funding should be increased and expanded to include land for expanding natural resources, and not decreased.

We understand that you received a letter from our former E2C2 Chair, Shannon Cunniff dated February 5, 2017. We echo her sentiments about increasing funding for implementation of the CEP. The County's Residential Utility Tax (RUT), which funds the AIRE program, has not changed since FY2008. Arlington has the lowest residential utility tax rate per kWh of any Northern Virginia jurisdiction (as of CY2016, according to the County's budget documentation). While the current budget does not include any changes to the RUT, we encourage the Board to direct County staff to investigate potential uses for funds generated through an RUT increase (or a removal of the \$3 monthly cap) in future years as a means for generating additional AIRE funding and facilitating CEP implementation.

We request that the Board retain the two cent property tax rate increase, which will maintain progress on sustainability issues while being responsive to the significant demands from Metro and Arlington Public Schools (APS). Thank you again for this opportunity to share E2C2's concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Ng". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christine" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Ng".

Christine Ng
E2C2 Chair