

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

c/o Department of Environmental Services

2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705

Arlington, VA 22201

March 24, 2015

The Honorable Mary Hynes, Chairman

Arlington County Board

2100 Clarendon Blvd.

Subject: Comment on County Manager's FY2016 Proposed Budget

Dear Chair Hynes:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the County Manager's proposed FY16 budget. The Environment and Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2) recognizes the fiscal constraints under which the County continues to operate. E2C2 supports the Manager's proposed budget and notes that it holds true to County Board guidance to fund the core service of environmental sustainability.

First, regarding the Department of Environmental Services (DES), Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy (AIRE), and the Community Energy Plan (CEP), the proposed budget funds all AIRE programs and activities and maintains support in several key areas of interest to E2C2 that are greatly appreciated. Members of this commission and our community helped create the CEP. It was adopted as policy by the Board and is now a Comprehensive Plan element. This action garnered attention by other jurisdictions nationally and has been touted by Arlington as one of the reasons this is a great place to live and work. The County plans for the long term well and stick to those community developed plans over time. Since FY08 expenditures for the AIRE program have been set equal to revenue generated from a residential utility tax. The tax was established to fund progress toward Arlington's long term energy and greenhouse gas emission (GHG) goals, and exercising the AIRE program Service Reduction Option staff cuts would constitute a detrimental break from that original purpose, funding strategy, and funding level. E2C2 believes it is critical that the dedicated AIRE program funding continue to be linked to the level of residential utility tax revenue. Therefore, the Commission does not support the elimination of AIRE staff listed in the Service Reduction Options of the Manager's Message (2.5FTE/7.5FTEs total). The CEP sets a long term vision that is early in its implementation, and exercising the optional budget cuts to AIRE staff would be counterproductive to those goals, plus it would contradict the Board's guidance and the County Manager's focus on environmental sustainability as a core service.

Second, we recognize that the County is currently negotiating a new Household Solid Waste contract and E2C2 encourages the County Board to exercise the option for year-round yard waste collection service in addition to refuse and recycling in FY16.

Third, other E2C2 concerns, including concerns we share with other commissions and committees, are as follows:

- Bike/Pedestrian: We are concerned that the diversion of the funds from the County's Vehicle Decal Fee Program to other program areas would directly reduce the funding to the pedestrian/bike improvement programs, and indirectly via reductions in matching by state and/or federal funds. Further, one of the Service Reduction Options is to eliminate one of two staff positions dedicated to pedestrian/bike programs. The proposed budget reductions would be a step backwards in the county's commitment to supporting walkable and bikeable communities, and may adversely impact people's health and safety.
- Natural Resource Maintenance: Two things. 1) We are pleased to see the \$100K/year for invasive species management which represents a low cost, high impact investment in preserving Arlington's capital stock in natural lands. 2) Two of the positions at the Nature Centers are currently vacant. Given the very low levels of staffing at both centers, the empty positions are impacting service levels. We urge the County to fill these positions.
- Land Acquisition Funding: Funding for land acquisition has dropped precipitously since 2008 and is inadequate for an effective program. We urge the County to fund land acquisition at a level that allows for meaningful acquisitions in our Metro corridors and along Columbia Pike, where Arlington's population growth is concentrated and the need for new public green/natural space is most pressing.
- Tree Planting: The proposed optional service cut to the FY 2016 tree planting budget of \$66,250 would reduce the number of trees the County could plant from an estimated 705 this year to 440 next year. This reduction would take the County below replacement level and reduce the benefits trees provide our County. We urge the Board to maintain tree planting funds at last year's baseline level.
- Urban Agriculture: Urban Agriculture has a relatively small budget and the Optional Service Reduction of \$80,000, or 45% of the base budget, would delay planned improvements for the community gardens program, prevent a plan to increase the reach of the Master Gardener's program and eliminate planned healthy food-related events and demonstrations. In addition to the Urban Agriculture Task Force there was much citizen participation and enthusiasm for the development and enhancement of programs that promote healthy local food production. It would be unfortunate to pull funding just as some of these initiatives are trying to be improved or formed.

We request that the Board consider the issues where E2C2 expresses concern. Thank you again for this opportunity to inform the County Board on key issues in our policy area.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Dicke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "S" and a trailing flourish.

Scott Dicke
E2C2 Chair