

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

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

March 28, 2022

Honorable Katie Cristol, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: FY 2023 Budget

Dear Chair Cristol,

In its most recent report, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned of a world on the brink. The urgency and escalating toll of climate change have never been clearer, it says. Any further delay "will force humanity to miss the brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable and sustainable future for all." According to climate experts, greenhouse gas emissions must be cut by 50 percent by 2030 to prevent the worst consequences of climate change. This target requires a rapid transition away from fossil fuels.

The proposed County FY 2023 Budget does not adequately reflect the urgency of the climate crisis or even the County's own commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, nor does it address the County Board's guidance in the FY 2022 Budget for a County whole of government approach to climate change and sustainability. ***C2E2 recommends that the County Board align the FY 2023 budget to address the climate emergency by creating a Chief Climate Officer position empowered to oversee a whole-of-government climate action policy, require electrification when upgrading County facilities' HVAC and other systems using fossil fuels, and specify high priority spending programs that will advance an equitable transition to a carbon neutral future for Arlington.***

C2E2 appreciates many of the initiatives highlighted in the proposed budget that address climate change and the environment:

- Investing in the Environment has for the first time been raised to a budget priority
- The County under the Board's direction has taken important steps toward shifting its vehicle fleet to EVs and expanding rooftop solar on County facilities. The County Board should make clear that supply chain disruptions and rising prices should not be used to justify the purchase of internal combustion engine vehicles.
- The creation of a \$1 million CEP fund offers flexibility to initiate pilots or take advantage of emerging opportunities, although the document needs to identify more explicitly how these funds will be spent and who will decide
- The addition of one position for AIRE, which has been the focal point for expertise and initiatives for meeting Arlington's energy goals, and an additional position for Facilities to support the transition to EV and rooftop solar.

Nevertheless, the proposed AIRE budget of \$2.3 million, while a 41 percent increase, is about the same level as in the FY 2018 budget (\$2.0 million), once inflation is taken into account. It's unclear whether all of the additional expenditures identified represent new spending; EV and solar initiatives are new, but most of the other items appear to be routine expenditures. Moreover, staffing is still lower than it had been at its height in 2014.

In our assessment the proposed budget does not sufficiently address the County Board's guidance to establish a **whole-of-government approach**. At this point we still do not have a clear picture of how the County plans to achieve its goal of climate neutrality, much less meet the urgent need to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

- The draft budget largely asserts that the County has a whole-of-government approach, but provides few details
- The draft CEP Roadmap identifies some additional actions to build on normal intra-governmental coordination – for example, a senior managers' group, an annual report, and greater tracking of progress—but these do not add up to a comprehensive approach.
- As of yet the plan lacks a staffing model or budget projections for staff, specified metrics or plans for integrating sustainability into the County's plans and policies, and a communications strategy, or conflict resolution process, all of which were requested by the County Board
- The most glaring defect in the County's all-of-government approach is the lack of expertise, commitment and leadership on climate and other environmental issues at a senior staff level. Everyone is doing their job, but it's no one's job, at a senior level, to be the climate leader, or to have expertise in this complex field. The result is that climate and environmental protection do not have a seat at the high-level table when decisions are made.

C2E2 urges that the County create a senior level Chief Climate Officer. Such a position has become standard and best practices in governments and businesses with successful climate and sustainability efforts, including among many of our regional peers. This approach has become common practice because a whole-of-government approach requires leadership from the top, not the middle. Such a senior manager would be able to offer expertise and guidance on aligning government policies, regulations, and programs with climate imperatives and overseeing programs and initiatives aimed at meeting the County's carbon neutrality goals.

C2E2 is also very concerned over the apparent unwillingness of the County government to commit to full **electrification** of County operations, particularly for its buildings. Decisions that extend reliance on fossil gas digs us deeper into the hole.

- The proposed budget refers to electrification as an 'emerging' technology—which it is not, really—and suggests that it is only appropriate for pilots at non-essential facilities
- Planned upgrades of HVAC equipment mentioned in the budget call for energy efficiency improvements with no mention of moving systems using fossil fuel to electric, which will further the County Government's goal of carbon neutrality once it meets its goal for 100% renewable electricity supply.
- Electrification in most instances is feasible. County staff needs to get out of its comfort zone, and consult appropriate experts. Business as usual is not an option.
- Similar to the guidance the County Board provided last year on electric vehicles, ***we urge the County Board to include guidance to the County Manager that would require electrification of new facilities and when upgrading systems, unless no alternative is feasible and that an explicit acknowledgement is made in both the budget as well as in the upcoming Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) on electrification status.***

Finally, the proposed FY23 Budget makes no provision for expanding the County's ability to help the entire community reduce greenhouse gas emissions. About 96% of the County's emissions come from the private sector, but the vast majority of County climate action spending is still directed at County operations. Education, encouragement, incentives, and assistance must play a critical role in meeting the urgent climate goals. ***We urge the County Board to incorporate resources into the budget to start to build a robust program with an expected rapid ramp up over the next few years. Specifically, C2E2 recommends that use of the CEP Action Fund and other available funding, including remaining American Rescue Plan Act funds, be prioritized for additional staff positions and consulting funds to support:***

- Programs targeted at retrofitting low-to moderate-income housing to reduce energy consumption, electrify, and install solar panels and EV chargers so that no one gets left behind
- The creation of a one-stop shop to connect residents, businesses, and building owners with information and resources to decarbonize their homes and businesses
- Robust public education and outreach efforts to encourage residents to save energy, electrify, and add rooftop solar where feasible
- Continual pursuit of funding from federal, state, and other sources to ensure funding for these efforts, including exploring options for the creation of a Green Bank and Community Choice Aggregation.

C2E2 appreciates the County Board's commitment to taking action that matches the scope of the climate crisis. We urge you to ensure that this budget as well as the next CIP reflect the urgency of the situation. The future of our children and our community depend on it.

Sincerely,



Joan McIntyre
Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission