

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

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

March 27, 2023

Honorable Christian Dorsey, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: FY 2024 Budget

Dear Chair Dorsey,

The Climate Change, Energy, and Environment Commission urges the County Board to adopt a FY 2024 budget with spending on climate action that meets the urgency of the moment. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change just warned with very high confidence that "There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all" (March 20, 2023). Climate experts advise that greenhouse gas emissions must be cut by 50 percent by 2030 to prevent the worst consequences of climate change. **Yet, Arlington has proposed to reduce by 8 percent its climate programming in the AIRE budget and eliminate the second position in the newly established Office of Climate Coordination and Policy.** C2E2 finds, in general, that the budget is vague on how the County will address the climate crisis and that it represents something of a retreat from commitments it made in the current year budget.

Notwithstanding, C2E2 appreciates certain County activities and achievements that the budget highlights, namely:

- County government electricity that is now 100 percent powered by renewable energy through the Maplewood facility, which will generate \$2.6 million in savings in the coming fiscal year.
- Efforts underway by the AIRE team and others to advance CEP goals.
- Continued success of the Solar Co-op.
- Progress in adding solar panels to County and Arlington Public Schools facilities.
- Installation of public EV chargers on County property.
- Conversion of the County's non-emergency fleet to EVs.
- Hiring of the County's first Climate Policy Coordinator; C2E2 is eager to begin working with him.

That said, **C2E2 finds that the proposed budget does not adequately fund programs and actions that would accelerate decarbonization of buildings and transportation within the County necessary to achieve our proposed GHG emissions reductions.** County residents, businesses, and property owners are in need of information, assistance, and incentives to get them over perceived obstacles to curtailing their carbon emissions. We therefore recommend that the County build on existing programs to provide a "one stop shop" that would:

- Prioritize comprehensive building retrofit pilots targeted to low-to-moderate income households and underserved communities to improve energy efficiency; electrify HVAC systems, hot water heaters, and appliances; and install rooftop solar and EV-charging infrastructure. Initial efforts at the Barcroft Apartments should be expanded upon to reach other committed and market-rate affordable housing in Arlington.
- Offer programs to educate, engage, encourage, inspire, assist, and incentivize the private sector and the public to meet our urgent climate goals. Enhancements and expansions of the Green Buildings Incentive Policy and the Green Homes Choice Program, adoption of several AIRE proposals to assist homeowners and small businesses in improving energy efficiency and shift to electric systems and appliances, and offer more programs like last year's Think Big event collectively could advance the County's GHG emissions reduction goal.
- Reinstate StormwaterWise Program, or similar programs, to mitigate problems with flooding and stormwater runoff.

The County Government should also lead by example and commit to:

- Ensuring funding is available to support transition to zero emissions buses for ART as existing buses reach their end of life and the new ARTBus Operations and Maintenance Facility comes online. Delaying transition to zero emission buses undermines the County's carbon neutrality goal and continues to expose vulnerable populations to pollutants from CNG buses.
- Embracing electrification and elimination of fossil fuel use as an essential climate action strategy for all County Government facilities as opportunities arise. The County has identified only one project, the Cultural Affairs Building, for an electrification pilot, and the budget includes funding for assessments of potential electrification in two additional facilities. With nine facilities under design and construction during FY24, it would seem there would be more opportunities – in alignment with Board guidance for the FY 2023-32 CIP – but the details remain opaque.

The long-term returns on investment for such programs, for both the County and its community members, in terms of energy savings, improved air quality, and health would be substantial and Arlington County should look to multiple strategies and opportunities to finance them, to include:

- **Allocating before the end of FY23 all of the \$1 million in CEP Implementation funds.**
- **Investing the \$2.6 million in savings just in FY24 in electricity costs** from its virtual power purchase agreement into climate actions.
- **Committing staff and contract resources to secure federal and other funding** to help Arlington transition away from fossil fuels to a clean energy future and assist residents and property owners to tap into available credits, rebates, and financing.
- **Pursuing opportunities to participate in a regional Green Bank** – Fairfax County appears to be moving forward on one — as well as Community Choice Aggregation.
- **Using the projected \$300,000 in revenue from the plastic bag tax** to expand clean-up efforts and education and outreach on recycling and waste reduction. These funds should be additive and not replace funds previously allocated funds for this purpose.

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 reflects the urgency of the situation. The future of our children and our community depend on it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan F. McIntyre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'M'.

Joan McIntyre

Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

CC: Mark Schwartz, County Manager

Greg Emanuel, Director Environmental Services