

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
C/o Department of Environmental Services 2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705
Arlington, VA 22201

June 27, 2022

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

RE: Proposed FY 2023 – FY 2032 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Dear Chair Cristol,

The Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2), with input from the Energy Committee (EC), has reviewed the proposed [CIP for FY 2023 – FY 2032](#). While we appreciate the County's stated aim of furthering environment and resiliency goals, several issues need to be addressed to successfully meet the profound environmental and climate changes facing the county and region, now and in the future.

We first acknowledge the County's progress in mapping the CIP to selected Community Energy Plan (CEP) and other environmental goals. In particular, we commend the CIP's investment in rooftop solar, support for vehicle electrification charging infrastructure, and sizable commitment to shifting the County's bus and other vehicle fleets to electric vehicles.

We also commend the CIP's investment in natural resources, including significant investments in trail and bridge modernization, the introduction of a new Natural Resiliency program, and the allocation of funding for park land acquisitions for the first time since 2017. Natural resiliency measures are particularly valuable and high-impact, helping to reduce the urban heat island effect, improve the quality of our parks and natural areas, and provide greater access to nature for all Arlington residents.

At the same time, C2E2 assesses that the CIP does not back up its claim that "measurable progress in meeting CEP targets" has been made as very few of the descriptions of projects identified in the County Manager's letter provide any measurement of improvement. Overall, the CIP's claim of \$649 million in environmental initiatives appears to overstate the County's commitment to meeting CEP goals and other environmental objectives. Many projects reflect ongoing and necessary investments to maintain or expand infrastructure and facilities without breaking out the added expenses of meeting specific energy or other environmental goals. Two major and critical expenditure items—stormwater infrastructure and the Water Pollution Control Plant—account for two-thirds of total investment.

1. THE CIP DOES NOT FULLY ALIGN WITH THE COMMUNITY ENERGY PLAN (CEP)

We do not believe the CIP, as proposed, addresses the County Board's 2021 guidance for a clear presentation of which projects in the CIP align with the CEP and other ongoing climate mitigation commitments made by the County.

We offer several recommendations. To ensure *a roadmap for decarbonizing County operations, the County Board should direct the County Manager to develop a decarbonization plan for County operations that is targeted to achieve carbon neutrality*. A clearly articulated roadmap tied to specific sources of greenhouse gas emissions from County operations would guide County capital investments toward advancing stated CEP goals.

Similar to the guidance that the County Board provided last year on electric vehicles, *we urge the Board to issue guidance to the County Manager that would require electrification of new facilities and existing ones, when gas-powered systems need replacement, unless there is no feasible alternative and the County Board is so informed*. The guidance should also require an explicit acknowledgment in the budget and upcoming CIP of the electrification status of each project. It is disappointing that, of the numerous HVAC replacement projects included in the CIP, only one is specifically targeted for electrification.

We recommend that the County Board request staff to provide a report describing the processes used across County Government to ensure that significant program and policy decisions are effectively reviewed for climate impact. This report will help ensure that decisions are aligned with the County's climate goals. Such assessments, as relevant, should address the imperative of reducing energy consumption, eliminating direct fossil fuels consumption, selecting materials with the lowest lifecycle carbon footprint, and use of outdoor lighting that is Dark Sky Compliant, as well as incorporating native plants and other elements of biophilic design.

2. OBJECTIVES FOR STORMWATER PROJECTS UNCLEAR

The CIP includes sizable and necessary investments to improve Arlington's aging stormwater system and mitigate the risks of flooding, a critical environmental objective in light of the increasing frequency of high intensity storms. However, the CIP offers little insight into exactly what each proposed project will accomplish. Better and more quantifiable descriptions for watershed improvement projects, identifying key goals for reducing flooding, overall stormwater runoff, soil erosion, and nutrient runoff, would provide County Board members and the public better insight in how these projects will benefit Arlington.

3. EQUITY OBJECTIVES ARE LARGELY ABSENT FROM THE CIP

We commend the stated goal of the County having an "equity lens overlaid throughout the entire CIP process." However, in parallel with the concerns raised above on the CEP, we question how the County will drive success in this area without an effective, articulated strategy with quantifiable outcomes. Across the entire CIP, equity programs are mentioned in just two projects – RAMP and stormwater. Planned investments in natural resiliency and expanded parkland, in

particular, offer an opportunity to improve equitable access to parks and reduce the heat island effects most prevalent in our ethnically diverse, lower-income neighborhoods. We urge the County Board to direct the County Manager to articulate how these projects further equity.

CONCLUSION

In short, we are running out of time to make significant progress in forestalling the worst impacts of climate change. Beyond the supportive language in the County Manager's Message, the CIP investments themselves do not adequately reflect the urgency of the climate crisis, and we are concerned that the CIP as proposed does not sufficiently set the County up to meet the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. ***C2E2 urges Arlington County to demonstrate its regional leadership by stepping up its commitment within the rapidly closing window to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.***

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the CIP and for your continued efforts to address Arlington County's environmental challenges now, and in the future.

Sincerely,



Joan McIntyre

Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

Cc: Mr. Mark Schwartz, County Manager