

July 2, 2026

Honorable Matt de Ferranti, Chair
Chair, Arlington County Board
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Proposed FY 2027 – FY 2036 Capital Improvement
Plan

Dear Chair de Ferranti,

Commission Members

Cindy Lewin, Chair
Rob Sandoli, Vice Chair
Alex Rough
David Friedman
Doug Snoeyenbos
Elizabeth Whitney
Henry Perillo
Joseph Trivette
Kevin Vincent
Liliana Diaz
Lisa Marcellus
Malcolm Gregory
Scott Brideau
Trevor Montano
Student Representative: Helen Hass

The Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Proposed FY 2027–FY 2036 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). We see real progress in this proposal, including in several areas C2E2 has raised in prior years, and encourage the County to build on each of these steps.

Among the items we commend: investments in on-site solar, capacity improvements in both the Spout Run and Lubber Run watersheds, adoption of a 1:1 replacement ratio for battery-electric buses; and a long-overdue, bond-funded commitment to natural-lands management and invasive species removal to protect our tree canopy.

We know the Board remains firmly committed to addressing the climate crisis, and that commitment must inform the investments in the CIP. To that end, we encourage the Board to view this ten-year plan as a tool for making Arlington more energy independent, more resilient, and more affordable to power. Investments in on-site generation, storage, and efficiency increasingly function as a source of savings and revenue rather than an expense—assets that hedge a rising and volatile energy cost and, in some cases, generate real returns. The recommendations below will help Arlington take advantage of this critical window of opportunity:

Evaluate energy investments as sources of savings and revenue that also advance our shared climate goals.

We are encouraged by several directions in the energy program: continued solar development; the Energy Performance Upgrades program's embrace of efficiency,

electrification, and demand-response measures; and the new Energy Resilience Planning effort, which names microgrids, battery storage, demand response, and virtual power plants (VPP) as solutions worth pursuing. Our recommendations aim to move from study and pilot toward committed investment.

Pilot an energy storage project and design facility retrofits to be battery-, solar-, and EV-ready. While C2E2 applauds the County's plans to pursue more on-site solar, we strongly encourage the County to consider funding at least one co-located energy storage battery pilot within the CIP funding term. Battery storage is not just for backup during an outage: it reduces system costs through peak shaving. Further, solar without storage cannot participate in a VPP, as the storage is what makes the asset dispatchable. Therefore, the County should either own storage assets outright or contemplate their revenue potential as part of any PPA or contract, especially as energy storage assets are still eligible for federal tax credits. At the very least, when the County undertakes a retrofit or major maintenance, it should build in the provisions—electrical capacity, conduit, structural and space allowances—that allow on-site solar, storage, and EV charging to be added later, even when it is not ready to fund those assets immediately.

Avoid defaulting to gas replacements on long-lived assets. Roughly 49 percent of this CIP proposal (\$1.5 billion of the General Fund–supported budget) is dedicated to maintaining existing assets. Routine maintenance, approached well, is therefore one of the County's most powerful tools for driving down facility energy use. C2E2 is concerned that the County's analysis of the Walter Reed boiler set aside electrification in favor of a like-for-like gas replacement because electrification costs more upfront and offered only a “modest” environmental benefit. That reasoning reflects exactly the lens we believe needs updating: it weighs first cost against emissions, holding gas prices flat, on an asset that will operate for twenty to thirty years. Re-evaluated as an investment decision—accounting for the trajectory of gas prices, the volatility driven by regional demand, and the County's growing ability to self-generate—the calculation can look very different. We recommend the County revisit such decisions on a full lifecycle-and-risk basis and, at minimum, ensure replacements are made with a full cost-benefit analysis of these factors. Committing now to new fossil gas infrastructure on long-lived County assets locks in exposure to a cost we project will rise and an emissions profile we cannot tolerate.

Commit to energy savings performance contracting. The CIP contemplates energy savings performance contracts (ESPCs), and C2E2 encourages the County to move from “may explore” to active commitment. ESPCs are a well-tested business model that allows governmental entities to capture efficiency improvements now and pay for them out of the resulting savings. A CIP focused on maintaining and upgrading existing facilities is the

ideal moment to deploy them, because embedding efficiency and electrification while work is underway captures value that is far costlier to add later.

Evaluate geothermal heating and cooling systems. C2E2 understands the County is considering geothermal heating and cooling, and we welcome additional information on how this can be reflected in the CIP. Geothermal offers significant efficiency gains and a meaningful hedge against fossil gas reliance, particularly given Arlington's exposure to both extreme heat and extreme cold. We encourage the County to bring this work forward and consider piloting at least one geothermal project within the CIP time frame.

Investments in water infrastructure should be clearly tied to flood risk reduction and contemplate a growing energy-water nexus.

We are pleased that the CIP funds capacity improvements in both the Spout Run and Lubber Run watersheds, alongside a substantial watershed-scale stormwater program and significant investment in drinking water resiliency. This responds directly to C2E2's prior recommendation that the County complete and act on feasibility analyses for the watersheds at greatest risk.

Communicate, in plain terms, what each stormwater project is expected to accomplish.

To build on the capacity investments in these watersheds, we renew one recommendation from prior letters: that the County describe the level of flood protection achieved, by storm-event standard, so that residents and the Board can see how completed projects translate into reduced risk.

Recognize the growing energy-water nexus. Pumping and treatment are among the County's most energy-intensive operations; on-site generation, storage, and efficiency at these facilities are investments that pay down a major and growing operating cost. The County's own experience participating in a VPP at the Water Pollution Control Plant returned meaningful revenue to the County last year, reinforcing this opportunity. We encourage the County to treat its water facilities as priority candidates for the generation and storage investments discussed above.

Advance sustainable mobility and treat its electrifying fleet as an energy and resilience asset.

C2E2 appreciates the County's continued investment in diversifying transportation options and reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. Programs such as BikeArlington, Capital Bikeshare, and WalkArlington are important investments that support more sustainable mobility choices and advance the County's Carbon Neutral 2050 goals.

We strongly support the one-for-one replacement of compressed natural gas (CNG) buses with zero-emission battery-electric buses (BEBs), reflected in the ART Fleet & Equipment and ART Zero-Emission Bus Transition programs. Beyond advancing the County's climate objectives, this transition delivers substantial public-health benefits. Accelerated fleet electrification may therefore also reduce long-term public health costs borne by the County.

Consider EVs and BEBs as grid assets. Consistent with the energy lens above, we further encourage the County to view the transitioning fleet and its charging infrastructure as energy and resilience assets—for example, by building toward bidirectional (two-way) charging so that idle buses can provide backup power and earn revenue through grid services. A fleet of BEBs and EVs can also be considered mobile resiliency hubs, if the electrical infrastructure to support bidirectional charging is built to contemplate such a use case.

Integrate Level 2 curbside charging in the public right-of-way, prioritizing multifamily and low- to moderate income neighborhoods. While Arlington is making early strides with public property and right-of-way charging, we are falling behind other counties and cities. Not only can public charging save residents money, L2 charging costs about half the cost of gasoline, it can generate revenue for the county. We can ensure Arlington is a leader in cost-effective and clean transportation by integrating Level 2 charging as a curbside resource. Priority should be given to communities that do not have easy access to chargers, such as neighborhoods dense with multifamily housing or single family neighborhoods less likely to be able to afford their own charger. This can include integrating curbside charging as a standard practice when upgrading roads and sidewalks in these neighborhoods.

Reduce embodied carbon. The County has an opportunity to source low-carbon building materials, such as through a green purchasing policy. For example, paving is one of the County's largest transportation expenses, and it carries significant embodied carbon. The County can lower that footprint without sacrificing performance or materially increasing cost by adopting a bundled set of low-barrier procurement and design standards: maximizing recycled content in asphalt, specifying warm-mix asphalt where local plant capacity allows, preferring carbon-mineralization technologies for concrete work, right-sizing pavement thickness on low-traffic residential streets, and—most importantly—embedding a proactive pavement-preservation program, since extending pavement life and reducing reconstruction frequency is the highest-leverage way to cut total material use across the network.

Consider ways to expand the County's institutional resilience to systemic community resilience.

C2E2 strongly supports the CIP's expanded, bond-funded Natural Resiliency & Habitat Restoration program and its goal of bringing all County-owned natural lands under active management by 2033. Investment in invasive-species removal is overdue and addresses a problem residents encounter directly—English ivy and other invasives are actively degrading Arlington's tree canopy. We are glad to see the County treat this work as the durable capital investment it is.

Prioritize resilience hubs that serve the community during disruptions. The CIP's new Energy Resilience Planning effort contemplates resiliency hubs, microgrids, and battery storage. As the County develops these facilities, we encourage prioritizing sites that can serve as community refuge centers: gathering places with guaranteed backup power where residents can shelter during severe weather or grid outages. This turns operational continuity for County buildings into genuine community care, the kind of recovery capacity a resilient community depends on. We note that schools, particularly those with on-site solar, are ideal candidates for the addition of a County-owned battery storage pilot project as they are already community gathering places.

Extend tree-canopy investment to the neighborhoods most exposed to extreme heat. The new forestry bond framework appropriately funds management of County-owned natural lands, but the County's greatest heat risk lies in its dense, heavily paved corridors—such as Rosslyn–Ballston and National Landing—where lower-income residents are often most exposed to the urban heat-island effect. We encourage the County to consider extending the geographic reach of this canopy investment beyond County-owned land to these high-heat, high-need areas, so the County is adapting where the physical risk to residents is greatest.

Leverage outside resilience funding. The Manager's Message proposes leveraging County dollars alongside corporate and community philanthropy to meet the County's housing needs. We encourage the County to apply the same logic to resilience: using County capital to match federal, state, and philanthropic grants, as well as private capital where appropriate, will allow the County to scale resilience investments that would otherwise be cost-prohibitive. Public-private partnerships can absorb the rising costs of climate adaptation without relying on municipal revenue alone.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the proposed CIP, and we look forward to working with you to make Arlington a thriving, resilient community now and in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cindy Lewin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cindy" and last name "Lewin" clearly distinguishable.

Cindy Lewin, Chair
C2E2

cc: Mason Kushnir, County Board Clerk
Mark Schwartz, County Manager
Members of the County Board
Jennifer Fioretti, Assistant County Manager for Climate Policy
Jason Papacosma, Bureau Chief, Office of Stormwater and Energy Management