CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

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

November 25, 2025

Honorable Takis Karantonis, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: 1800 & 1901 S. Bell Street Adaptive Reuse Project

Dear Chair Karantonis:

The Climate Change, Energy, and Environment Commission (C2E2) has reviewed the available information on the proposed adaptive reuse of 1800 and 1901 S. Bell Street by JBG Smith. The project proposes to convert two existing office buildings into approximately 315 residential units (129 units at 1800 S. Bell and 186 units at 1901 S. Bell), along with new retail space. We commend the County and the applicant for pursuing adaptive reuse, which can substantially reduce embodied carbon compared to demolition and new construction.

At this time, however, there is limited publicly available information on the project's environmental and energy performance. The materials do not specify whether the project will pursue LEED or other green-building certification, its target energy performance, or its approach to electrification, parking, or EV infrastructure. **In the absence of a Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) process for adaptive-reuse projects we are not in a position to assign a numerical sustainability score comparable to past non-adaptive reuse projects, even recognizing that JBG Smith has provided more information than was available for the last adaptive reuse project we reviewed.**

That said, the proposed retention of the existing buildings and the planned framework for Center Park—eventually totaling approximately 74,200 square feet—are consistent with Arlington's goals for sustainability, resource conservation, and livability**.** Adaptive reuse paired with incremental park delivery aligns with the County's objectives to balance climate action with efficient urban redevelopment.

We view this as an opportunity to establish clearer criteria for evaluating future adaptive-reuse proposals. C2E2 welcomes collaboration with County staff to develop a consistent framework for assessing sustainability performance, ensuring that these beneficial conversions continue to advance Arlington's energy and climate goals. While we understand that speed and flexibility are key incentives for adaptive reuse, we believe that

additional project-level information can and should be made publicly available to support transparency and accountability.

We offer the following observations and recommendations:

Adaptive Reuse and Embodied Carbon

The adaptive reuse proposal aligns with the Crystal City Sector Plan's long-term vision for Center Park, which ultimately envisions a 74,200-square-foot park as the "centerpiece" and "focal point" of the area. Under current plans, approximately 45,000 square feet of that park easement has already been or will be delivered through nearby development, with the remainder to be completed over time as additional parcels are redeveloped. By reusing the existing buildings at 1800 and 1901 S. Bell, the project helps preserve embodied carbon while maintaining the framework for the park's eventual full build-out.

Reusing the existing structures at 1800 and 1901 S. Bell Street is inherently beneficial for reducing embodied carbon. These buildings, constructed in the late 1960s as part of the Crystal Mall development, represent significant embodied energy that would be lost through demolition. We encourage the Applicant to quantify these embodied carbon benefits and to maximize diversion of materials from landfill during any selective demolition work. Use of low-carbon materials (FSC-certified wood, low-carbon concrete, recycled steel) in the renovation can further enhance the project's sustainability profile.

Energy Efficiency and Electrification

To align with the Community Energy Plan (CEP), new residential projects should be designed to be zero-carbon-ready: highly efficient, fully electric, supplied by renewable energy, and built with low-carbon materials. We encourage the Applicant to commit to current LEED v5 (or equivalent) standards and to make public its energy model assumptions, including projected energy use intensity (EUI) and greenhouse gas emissions over a 25-year horizon.

Given the building's age and former office use, substantial HVAC and building systems upgrades will likely be required. This presents an ideal opportunity to install high-efficiency, all-electric systems including heat pump technology for heating and cooling, electric heat pump water heaters, and induction cooking appliances in all units. We strongly recommend avoiding the installation of any new natural gas infrastructure, which would lock in fossil fuel dependence and indoor air quality concerns for decades to come.

Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

We found no publicly available information on parking counts or EV-ready spaces for this project. Given the rapid uptake of electric vehicles in Virginia, we strongly recommend that at least 50 percent of parking spaces be EV-ready, with smart-charging capabilities to minimize electrical demand and future retrofit costs. The existing parking infrastructure at these buildings should be evaluated for electrical capacity upgrades to support widespread EV adoption.

Renewable Energy and Site Enhancements

We encourage the Applicant to explore on-site renewable generation on available roof areas, participation in Arlington's Green Power Community Challenge, and integration of biophilic design elements. The project site offers opportunities for enhanced tree canopy, green roofs, or rooftop gardens where feasible to mitigate urban heat-island effects and improve residents' health and well-being.

Comparison to Similar JBG Smith Projects

We note that JBG Smith is simultaneously pursuing adaptive reuse conversions at 2200 Crystal Drive (195 units) and other National Landing properties. We encourage consistency in sustainability standards across these projects and transparency about environmental performance metrics. Establishing high sustainability standards for this project could serve as a model for the developer's other conversions in the neighborhood.

Conclusion

C2E2 supports the County's goal of transforming under-utilized office space into housing and green space through the adaptive reuse process. This project offers an important opportunity to demonstrate that adaptive reuse can also achieve high performance in energy efficiency, electrification, renewable energy, and sustainable materials. We urge the Applicant to opt into programs like the Arlington Green Building Initiative and/or C-PACE to demonstrate commitment to environmental excellence.

The conversion of 1800 and 1901 S. Bell Street represent a significant opportunity to add housing and green space while reducing embodied carbon impacts. However, without public documentation of sustainability commitments, we cannot assess fully whether this project will contribute to Arlington's climate goals or simply perpetuate outdated building practices in a renovated structure. We strongly encourage the Applicant to publicly document comprehensive sustainability plans before construction begins.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input and stand ready to work with staff and the Applicant to address these issues.

Sincerely,

Cindy Lewin
Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission