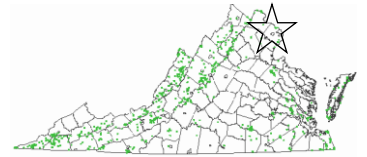




POTOMAC RIVER GROUP VIRGINIA CHAPTER

THE CITIES OF ALEXANDRIA & FALLS CHURCH, AND ARLINGTON COUNTY



April 3, 2021

Mr. Matt de Ferranti
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: FY22 Budget Comments

Dear Chair de Ferranti:

We submit these budget comments on behalf of more than 2,000 members of the Potomac River Group of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club.

1. A whole-of-government approach is necessary to address climate change

Not surprisingly, this budget uses the word “COVID” 525 times. However, it does not use the phrase “climate change” even once. This is a rough measure of the challenge before us. How do we get to the point where every program, project and procurement funded through this budget is reviewed for opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? How do we empower every employee to look creatively and deeply for new ideas to address climate change in their work? How do we arrive at a budget that does not fund the purchase of new fossil fuel equipment – cars, buses, leaf blowers, heating systems, etc. -- when emission-free alternatives are available?

Other governments are solving these problems by adopting a whole-of-government approach. In essence, this approach combines bottom-up and top-down strategies to systematically integrate goals across administrative boundaries. The County is effectively doing this in addressing COVID and Equity, for example, but has not effectively extended this approach to addressing climate change. Examples of steps taken in other localities include:

- requiring that projects are evaluated for their climate impact before approval;
- establishing a coordinating position within the County Manager’s office;
- maintaining an active ongoing high-level interdepartmental climate action team; and
- requiring that the social cost of carbon be considered in procurement decisions.

We recommend that the County Board work with staff to develop an effective whole-of-government approach to climate change, incorporating systematic measures such as those mentioned above.

2. Achieving Arlington's goal of 100% renewable electricity by 2035

Arlington adopted an ambitious but achievable goal of 100% renewable electricity by 2035. One of the most common strategies being used by other communities to achieve similar goals is to create a Community Choice Aggregation (CCA). This approach allows an entire community to purchase electricity for its own account, allowing the community to shift to renewable electricity on a timeline it chooses, while the utility continues to be responsible for electricity distribution and billing. A local nonprofit, Virginia Clean Energy, has conducted legal and economic analyses for Arlington indicating that this approach is legally sound and economically desirable. (See, <https://www.virginiacleanenergy.org/projects.html>.)

We recommend that the County Board request an independent evaluation of the feasibility of the CCA approach, and of any other feasible approaches to achieving a community-wide shift to renewable electricity. This single measure could deliver greenhouse gas benefits far in excess of any other strategy at little or no net cost to the County or utility customers.

3. Ending the purchase of internal combustion engine (ICE) sedans for the County Fleet

The County is proceeding with detailed planning necessary to electrify all of its vehicle fleets. There is one class of vehicle, however, for which the data is clear. Zero-emission (ZEV) sedans already are, on average, less expensive than fossil fuel sedans on a total-cost-of-ownership basis, according to the County's consultant, ICF. ZEV sedans have a higher initial cost that is offset by sharply lower fuel and maintenance costs. These numbers favor ZEV sedans even without adding any amount for the substantial social cost of carbon emissions by ICE vehicles, currently set by the federal government at \$51 per ton of carbon pollution. Once *any* estimate of the cost of carbon emissions is added to the equation, as it should be, the decision to stop purchasing ICE sedans is an easy one.

In light of the above, we make three recommendations:

- Beginning in FY22, *every new sedan purchased by the County should be a ZEV*. This will result in a gradual transition of the sedan fleet to all ZEV over the coming decade.
- Beginning in FY22, any proposed purchase of an ICE vehicle of any class should include a justification for not purchasing a zero-emission vehicle, indicating due diligence in researching available options.
- The County should delay planned purchases of ICE vehicles in any class when possible, consistent with safety guidelines, to maximize the probability that a zero-emission alternative will become available.

4. Eliminating single-use plastics in County Government and fulfilling the County's 2015 Zero Waste Resolution

We see two currently unfunded solid waste management projects that should be priorities for action in FY22:

- The County should seize the moment created by Governor Northam's recent Executive Order 77, phasing out the use of single use plastics by state government. (See, <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/executive-actions/>.) Arlington County Government can lead by example by adopting a similar measure in its own operations. We urge the Board to work with the Solid Waste Bureau to enact this policy quickly and fully fund its implementation.
- The County is long overdue for careful study and planning needed to achieve goals established by the Zero Waste Resolution of 2015. Funds should be included to begin this work in FY22.

We are happy to see that the Solid Waste Bureau will begin collecting food scraps on September 6, 2021. We also support the County's effort to adopt a plastic bag tax as soon as regulatory details are clarified.

5. Phasing out gas-powered leaf blowers

The Board should request development of a plan for the Department of Parks and Recreation to phase out its use of gas-powered leaf blowers, with implementation to begin in FY22 and end no later than FY25. The noise and pollution generated by this equipment is unhealthy for operators, bystanders, nearby residents, and the planet. The carbon emissions are shockingly high due to the lack of pollution control technology. Emission-free commercial-grade electric leaf blowers are greatly improved from prior models and are now in use by many local governments.

6. Funding the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)

VCE staff and programs generate nearly 43,000 hours of volunteer hours valued at \$2.3 million per year. Programs include 4-H programs for underserved youth, Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Tree Stewards, and many others. We believe this proposed cut, which would lead to a 60 percent reduction in programmatic staff funding, should be reconsidered.

We would be happy to discuss these budget concerns with you in greater detail at any time.

Sincerely,



John Bloom
Chair, Potomac River Group, Virginia Chapter

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Greg Emanuel, Director, Department of Environmental Services
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation
Demetra McBride, Chief, Office of Sustainability and Environmental Management