

2024 County Board Candidates Questionnaire

In recent years Arlington has experienced intense rainfall, flooding, record breaking temperatures, and periods of unhealthy air quality as the impact of the growing climate crisis and broader degradation of our natural environment becomes clearer, Arlington is experiencing. County Board members will be expected to lead efforts to mitigate and adapt to these changing conditions. To assist voters in assessing how candidates will advance the County's climate goals for carbon neutrality and protection and enhancement of tree canopy coverage and natural resources, EcoAction Arlington and Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions requests that you complete this questionnaire, which we will share with our membership and the public at large.

- 1. Arlington continues to face significant development in residential and commercial sectors. While new buildings can be more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable, the tear down of existing structures have significant climate impacts and community displacement. Given private developers rights and significant leeway in choosing how to develop land parcels, if elected, what specific solutions and policies would you endorse that would better ensure a more climate solution and equitable outcome to the county's residential and commercial development?**

I would first look at lot coverage. Regardless of one's thoughts about MMH/EHO, new structures tend to be built larger than the existing homes, whether that new home be single-family or multi-family housing. This has an impact on our environment. Larger homes also tend to be more expensive, so requiring that new homes be built to not exceed the existing coverage on that specific lot will both positively impact the environment and help to keep the new home less expensive.

I would also require a more robust tree planting mandate. While Arlington does have some tree requirements now, builders can pay a

penalty if they remove or do not plant more trees. I would not allow this option to pay a penalty. I would advocate that the County Board require builders maintain and/or plant trees or have their permit denied/revoked.

I'd also strongly advocate the new buildings, both residential and commercial, be built with green roofs. Surprisingly, that is not something we see in Arlington. There are vast benefits to green roofs. They improve stormwater management, which as you know is a major issue in Arlington, and reduce the effects of heat islands during hot summer months. Green roofs reduce air pollution as plants improve air quality. Green roofs also reduce the amount of energy needed to regulate building temperatures. And finally, green roofs are beautiful as well.

- 2. How can Arlington County best lead by example in phasing out fossil fuels, reducing its carbon emissions from facilities and operations, and advancing its zero waste goals? How can the County use the annual budget, the Capital Improvement Plan, and internal policy guidelines for construction, purchasing, and operations to advance a whole of government approach to addressing the climate crisis?**

For starters, the power grid in parts of Arlington, particularly in south Arlington, is quite old and needs updating. In my neighborhood of Arlington Ridge, we lose power with some regularity. Updating the power grid will reduce carbon emissions. With the EHO/MMH initiative, there is no requirement for developers to make updates to infrastructure (power grids, pipes, etc.) as there is with new office or apartment buildings. Developers can tap into existing county infrastructure without making upgrades even though they are potentially increasing the strain on the infrastructure, whereas with office and apartment buildings, developers are required to upgrade the county infrastructure to accommodate the increased usage caused by the new building. All new buildings—residential and commercial—should be mandated to make upgrades to county

infrastructure, including the power grid, if they will be increasing the burden on the infrastructure. This needs to be addressed in future Community Energy Plans.

Relatedly, we must focus more on renewable energy sources. From the electric ART buses and other county vehicles to installing more vehicle charging stations in public locations, we can and should do more to use and promote the use of renewable energy sources. To make this successful, the county must educate residents and businesses to include engagement and Arlington must also collaborate with nearby communities, energy companies, and environmental organizations to identify and implement best practices. How the county will do these things should also be included in future Community Energy Plans.

There should also be focus on the use of energy efficient electric heat pumps or other alternatives rather than methane gas when it comes to heating buildings and homes, but this speaks to an issue that goes beyond Arlington. The U.S. government often subsidizes the gas industry, which can keep the cost of using gas lower than electric heat pumps in some cases. Arlington is already very expensive and people living in older homes especially may not be inclined to make this switch because it has the potential to increase the costs associated with heating their homes. Success in this area would require incentivizing the use of electric heat pumps to offset the costs of keeping older methane gas systems. I would support these incentives. I'd also require new structures to use energy efficient and environmentally friendly sources that do not depend on fossil fuels.

- 3. Achieving the County's goal for carbon neutrality, zero waste, tree canopy coverage, and other environmental goals requires actions and behavior changes by residents and businesses. What strategies, policies, and programs would you pursue to promote and incentivize the private sector to reduce their carbon footprint. In particular, how can Arlington County promote reduced energy use and electrification of both**

buildings and transportation, encourage use of transit, biking, and walking over single occupancy vehicles, foster waste reduction, reuse, composting, and effective recycling?

We need a multifaceted approach. I would work to:

- Implement policy that sets green building standard for new construction in Arlington.
- Better coordinate with Metro. Metro has a full network of buses in Arlington as well as ART and with close coordination, Arlington can maximize bus coverage in the county and ensure bus service better meets the needs of the community. This may include reevaluating bus routes that do not meet performance metrics and creating new bus routes where they are needed.
- Evaluate the safety of locations to promote more walking and bicycling. The County should do this by engaging the neighborhoods and asking the people who live there what can be done to prioritize safety. This seems kind of basic, but it doesn't happen and the people who live there and drive, walk, and bike through that neighborhood know better than anyone else what needs to be improved. For example, the County recently changed the lights at the intersection of 23rd Street S and Arlington Ridge Road. Now because of the timing of the lights, it is next to impossible to make a left turn. Sometimes you need to wait two or three light cycles to make a safe left turn. This in turn is likely to create scenarios where people will start going through red lights and making riskier left turns. That makes drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians (and that intersection is frequented by children walking to Oakridge, the private school on 23rd, and Gunston) less safe because the County made changes without asking anyone who lived there what changes should (or should not) be made.
- Do better at recycling glass. I recognize that glass is no longer included in the recycling bins we have in our homes and that glass needs to be taken to certain locations throughout Arlington, but this is quite inconvenient and disincentivizes

glass recycling. I'd like the county to consider allowing residents to rent a recycling bin specifically for glass and collect the glass as the county does with trash and other recycling.

- I would like to see Arlington implement/expand a tree planting program, like the native tree distribution program EcoAction Arlington has.

4. Arlington's tree canopy and green spaces are in crisis, while stormwater impacts from impervious surfaces are increasingly severe. Site development, whether commercial or residential, usually results in clear cut lots and limited replacement of mature shade trees. Yet the County Board has made climate resilience and mitigation a top priority. With the recent adoption of a new Forestry and Natural Resources Plan that calls for restoration of a 40% tree canopy cover, what "new" approaches are needed to reverse the tree loss trends and gain the greater climate resilience benefits that mature tree canopies provide, particularly in Arlington's more disadvantaged neighborhoods?

You are absolutely correct that the County's policies are incongruent. I'd also add that the County's credit for having permeable surfaces on one's property is excessively confusing. I personally didn't request the credit—even though I had recently removed paver stones from my back patio and replaced them with grass and gravel—because I could not figure out how to calculate it. Regarding your specific question, I would give tax credits to homeowners and building owners for the number of trees on their property. Counting trees is far easier than figuring out the square footage of permeable surfaces. I'd also make building permit approvals contingent upon keeping mature trees. Planting a new tree is good, but maintaining mature trees is better.