

ECO Action Questionnaire

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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?

It is key to have a robust action plan on both the commercial and residential fronts.. I subscribe to the familiar adage; the greenest buildings are the ones already built.

On the Commercial Side:

As a result of the County's alarming growing vacancy rate, critical tax revenues from commercial office space have declined dramatically. This issue is not isolated to Arlington. It is a country wide problem. Telecommuting has become the preferred way to work for many. Where commercial and residential tax revenues used to generate equal amounts, the residential side is now picking up the slack, putting a burden on residents.

Arlington needs to take steps to address this serious issue, including exploring converting suitable parts of our vast and record-high empty commercial space into new uses including housing. We need to do this before we allow private developers to randomly densify the County.

In consultation with County Board colleagues, one of my first steps in the first 30 days as a County Board Member will be to start the process of convening a group of experts from the community to form a high-level Commercial Office Vacancy Task Force. There is a resiliency committee that appears to be staff driven, but it is unclear how active it is. The mission of a community-driven group focusing on the commercial side, would be to develop an effective short-term response as well as a long-term strategic plan for the County. **As part of the overall effort, I would also explore organizing a public summit on the commercial space vacancy rate to get public input.**

The task force would explore numerous ideas including the mechanics of populating empty offices with essential services. The thinking is these essential services would attract businesses and workers back to offices in Arlington. Essential services and amenities would include parks and open green space, affordable childcare and health care facilities, and even grocery stores. The task force will also investigate transit affordability and improvements that could help improve people's commute experience. The task force would also dive into regulatory, permitting, fee and tax reforms.

Energy-Efficient Buildings: I would like to see more focus on ensuring our commercial buildings are greener. This would include exploring adopting a program to track the energy efficiency and associated carbon emissions of commercial buildings. This would include tracking buildings energy

usage and associated carbon emissions by metering the electricity, gas, water, etc., usage. It would also include promoting the active adoption of solar and other energy efficiency measures.

Prime Opportunities

Historical & Civic Needs: In the short-term there are numerous creative ideas being explored for repurposing empty commercial space. Some are becoming reality. One major area Natalie will focus on is civic needs with historical significance. A great example is **The Black Heritage Museum of Arlington Virginia**.

The Black Heritage Museum is a county jewel, that needs a permanent home. Currently it is in temporary quarters on Columbia Pike. I will work with the new Task Force, the museum leadership, community members and fellow Board members and staff, to explore empty prime commercial space to find a centrally located, permanent space for the Museum.

Converting Commercial to Residential: I will also work with the Task Force to develop a priority list of the vacant commercial spaces most attractive for conversion to residential use. In addition, she would ask the Task Force to examine the standards already adopted by other jurisdictions like Alexandria, Fairfax and D.C. to facilitate office to residential conversions, and recommend those that ought to be adopted in Arlington. As a County Board Member, I would also explore private public partnerships on this front. An important role as a Board Member is one of a convener and this would be a great opportunity to harness the power of private public partnerships.

Community Benefits: The County can do better on this front, especially how it relates to affordable housing and open green space. Developers should not be dictating what they can offer. We should be negotiating much more aggressive packages from developers to ensure that in return for a new development, they are providing critical benefits to the community. This would include providing greenspace, traffic calming and additional affordable housing for families.

On the Residential Front:

Fifty years ago, Arlington's leaders made the courageous decision to build the Metro lines not along the freeways (as in Fairfax), but along the major commercial arterials of Wilson Blvd and Crystal City. Since then, thousands of homes in multi-unit high rises and townhouses have been built within easy walking distance of transit, as well as the dense commercial and office development spurred by Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Arlington today is one of the most densely populated counties in the country and its TOD is a national model.

Unfortunately, the County's random density efforts (Expanded Housing Options (EHO) are undermining TOD and Arlington's longstanding environmental leadership, by promoting random densification everywhere, including in areas without easy access to transit. In addition to increasing use of cars, the developer-driven EHO program will violate lot-coverage objectives, destroy our precious tree canopy, and reduce the bike-ability of our streets by promoting car traffic.

In addition, the County did not do its due diligence and study the impact of this major zoning change on stormwater management, resource protection areas, infrastructure, schools or emergency services. Nor will the developer driven EHO make housing more affordable for low- or moderate-income families. Building more \$1.3+ million townhouses will not promote housing justice. If we want to build deeply affordable and missing-middle housing, we must promote the kind of development that has been proposed for the Goodwill site at Route 50 and Glebe Road (which I support) and require developers to build more 3- bedroom affordable units in multi-unit

high rises. We need long range, comprehensive planning that has community support, not scattershot densification that is taking Arlington in the wrong environmental direction.

And if we want to increase housing opportunities without destroying our hard-fought environmental victories, we should preserve TOD, insist on open space in large development projects, and not allow developers to buy their way out of lot coverage and community benefit requirements. We also need to explore establishing non-profit investment trusts & coops, that can buy tear downs and older multi-family buildings and upgrade them to code and sell these homes to middle and low-income residents.

Energy Efficiency: The County also needs to explore a much more pro-active approach by offering home energy audits and promoting solar county-wide.

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?

The County should explore:

- *Conducting more comprehensive cradle-to-grave planning and implementation throughout its entire operations. County government is siloed, and we need to embrace a holistic approach to be more environmentally sound and promote efficiency.*
- *Elevating the County's climate policy officer within County government to give it the gravitas it deserves. Currently this position appears to be on the periphery.*
- *Leading by example, which includes converting all fleets to electric, adopting more robust environmentally sound procurement practices and active and transparent reviews of environmental programs which includes current recycling and energy efficiency efforts.*
- *Focusing on improving public transit and transportation options county-wide.*

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?

Some of the strategies I would enlist include:

- *Developing a comprehensive and holistic approach to connecting pedestrian and bike-friendly routes throughout the County. To promote safety for bicyclists and pedestrians we need to connect many of these missing links. We also need to see how we can eliminate the silos in County government to see how we can be more efficient in delivering services. For example, when a sidewalk or protective bike lane is created, street traffic calming should be part of the equation, not an afterthought.*
- *We need to explore installing EV charging centers throughout the County to ensure that everyone across the County has access. To pay for this, we need to make significant*

investments, which will reap dividends in the future. We also need to pursue private-public partnerships and look into applying for federal and state grant dollars, since the costs for EV charging installation can be daunting for many.

- *We need to do a thorough review of our recycling program to shine some light on results and how we can improve. We also need to examine bringing glass back into our curbside program.*

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?

The County needs to be much more aggressive in its efforts to protect our precious tree canopy. While giving out trees to plant is a worthwhile, we need to go above and beyond

Some of the strategies on this front include:

- *Accountability. County inspections, after a home or building has been constructed. The County needs to be more aggressive ensuring developers and homeowners are following through on their tree canopy plans. This is crucial. Currently a developer knows that once they scrap a lot and build a new home, it is highly unlikely the County will return to inspect a property to check on the success of the tree canopy plan.*
- *Explore a tree bonding program, which other jurisdictions in the region have implemented. A bonding program where developers pay into a fund and get the money back after a certain period, if the trees are still standing, etc. This type of program could provide much needed incentives to developers to ensure they are doing everything possible to protect tree canopy on their commercial and residential developments.*
- *I also want to see a more aggressive planning on this front. All new developments and parks need to have mature tree canopy and greenspace as top priorities. A park and open space with no shade trees and mostly comprised of concrete is not a park, and not a plus to the community.*