



## 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, by Friday, September 6.

*Instructions - Please provide your name and answer to each question below and email to Joan McIntyre, [jmcintyre57@gmail.com](mailto:jmcintyre57@gmail.com)).*

Name           **Juan Carlos Fierro**          

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?

If elected I would promote policies of providing incentives to developers to avoid teardowns of existing structures that contribute to negative environmental and climate impacts. Instead of teardowns, incentives should be provided to encourage developers to repurpose buildings for other uses, such as converting vacant commercial buildings to residential. Likewise, we need to encourage

the preservation of existing mature trees by making it very expensive for an owner or developer to cut down existing mature trees.

I would also support strengthening the zoning ordinance to discourage rampant densification such as increased bonus density that have detrimental environmental and climate impacts. Likewise, I would restrict multifamily units to viable transportation corridors and preserve single family zoning to help preserve our tree canopy.

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?

Arlington County presently has a robust plan to phase out fossil fuels from county facilities and operations. However, given the fluid nature and changing costs of alternate energy sources, during the budget process and in formulating the Capitol Improvement Plan cost effective analysis should be done annually given that one year one option may be more cost effective, but the next year it may not be because of cost changes in the marketplace.

Arlington's best options to address the climate crises is preserving the existing tree canopy (to include mature trees), and carefully consider the negative climate impacts of densification policies.

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?

Arlington County is presently doing a good job in promoting measures to reduce the carbon footprint by residents and businesses. While the program to reduce the carbon footprint is exemplary, the promotional program should recognize that the change will be gradual since we should not expect drastic changes by the population if they are not convinced of the need for electrification. Example – several folks still prefer gas stoves to electric ones, and we should respect that view. We should not impose the need to convert to gas if they do not want to.

However, the County is not setting an example by still pursuing policies that undermine energy reduction such as not doing an adequate job of preserving the tree canopy and mature trees, and not adequately funding the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan. Lack of tree canopy and green space increases electrical demand for cooling, which increases our energy demand.

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 is not doing enough to discourage developers to clear cut lots of mature trees. If there are existing mature trees on site, there should be high permit fees if the developer decides to cut them down.

To increase the tree canopy and to increase parkland acreage the County should consider buying more parcels of land especially in areas with a high density of elevator apartments where residents are deprived of the benefit of a healthy tree canopy and access to parkland.<sup>1</sup>

The Parkland Acquisition Plan of the county has been dismal during the past two decades. Since the County has been more focused on encouraging private developers to build public plazas (Privately Owned Public Spaces) The County says this increases “public spaces” acreage as opposed to having developers donate or pay for land that would be a true public park.<sup>2</sup>

I support the planned restoration of the tree canopy by 40% as mentioned in the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan. But this will require the willingness to purchase large tracks of land for park land acquisition and expand the tree canopy. This cannot be accomplished by relying on “Private Owned Public Spaces” given that sine the owners of private land may try to develop these lands for other purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> See The Arlington County Civic Federation’s White Paper on Open Space Equity. [2021-02 ParksRec Open Space Equity Resolution White Paper.pdf \(civfed.org\)](#). This paper presents an interesting analysis that residents who live in elevator apartment buildings are deprived of adequate access to parkland and tree canopy as opposed to those that live in Condos, or single family residents.

<sup>2</sup> See Public Spaces Master Plan [PSMP Final Draft\\_06242019.pdf \(arlingtonparks.us\)](#), p. 55. Provides insight into Parkland land acquisition, and how the County is attempting to use “Private Open Space” land as part of their goal of meeting the overall goal of 10 acres per year.