



Faith Alliance for
Climate Solutions
Arlington



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Engaging Our Community in Caring for Our Environment.



SIERRA CLUB
POTOMAC RIVER GROUP

February 6, 2025

The Honorable Takis Karantonis
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: **Proposed Climate Resolution**

Dear Chair Karantonis and Members of the Arlington County Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft proposed 2025 Climate Resolution. On behalf of our members and supporters, we strongly support this effort to amplify Arlington's commitment to taking aggressive actions to combat the climate crisis. The proposed Resolution sets the stage for whole of government and whole of community to drive decision making, communications, and community action. Amid serious threats to roll back federal climate commitments, it is important that local and state governments show public support for advancing climate solutions.

The Resolution acknowledges the urgency of the crisis and its inequitable impact on the most vulnerable members of our community and calls for broad collaboration with community organizations, businesses, and neighboring jurisdictions. Nevertheless, we believe it can be made stronger and provide greater clarity in some areas. Please consider the following recommendations:

Assessment Framework - We recommend that the Resolution call for the creation of a common framework for ensuring that decision making within the County Government is consistent with the goals of this resolution. Requiring all departments to follow a common approach, similar to the Equity questions, will help guarantee a whole of government effort.

Fossil Fuels - As strong as the draft Resolution is in many areas, we suggest that the Whereas clause that notes the distribution of the County's GHG emissions state that almost all of these emissions come from burning fossil fuels. It's critical to cite the root cause of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) - the extraction, transport, and burning of fossil fuels. Calling out fossil fuels strengthens and clarifies the resolution's stated goals and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, establishing its importance for county government operations and the Arlington public community at large to end fossil fuel use as quickly as possible. We know that we cannot eliminate fossil fuel use overnight, but we can no longer proceed in thinking that we have an

abundance of time to do so, or that we can lean on older thinking that there are “bridge” fossil fuels that can extend our transition.

Embodied Carbon - The Resolution should also acknowledge the importance of addressing embodied carbon (scope 3 emissions), especially those resulting from waste streams and construction, in reducing overall GHG emissions within the County.

Climate Action Plan - The Resolution calls for the development and adoption of a Climate Action Plan (CAP) that will outline in more detail action steps necessary to execute the intent and aspirations found in the Resolution. Development of a CAP is a logical next step but we ask you to consider specifying that it:

- Be completed as quickly as possible;
- Is bold and very clear in language and objectives;
- Makes clear the obligation and role of County offices and agencies to work in support of the whole of government objective;
- Ensures accelerated climate policy actions while development of the CAP proceeds administratively.

Resolution’s Intent - The draft Resolution has a very strong “therefore” provision (#11) that captures the intent and breadth of the Resolution well.

11. Advance a comprehensive energy and environmental strategy that (a) harmonizes policies, programs, and practices that aim to result in measurable progress towards County goals; (b) fosters cooperation at all levels of government on greenhouse gas reduction; (c) supports a transition to renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure; (d) to the extent permitted by law, enhances public-private partnerships in energy efficiency, (e) supports recycling, (f) conserves urban forests and natural resources; (g) improves stormwater management, and (h) ensures accountability for environmental impacts of hazardous substances.

We recommend moving this provision up from #11 to #1 to better reinforce the objectives and the other action steps that follow. We also recommend changing (d) to add electrification to highlight the main mechanism for phasing out fossil fuels, and “(e) supports recycling,” to “waste reduction and recycling” which is in line with the Zero Waste Resolution adopted last summer and touches on the broader need to reduce embodied carbon.

Setting Ambitious, Measurable Goals - We believe that setting high level, interim goals within the Climate Resolution will identify the scale of required action that aligns with the urgency of the crisis. Our recommended goals include:

- Striving to meet the 50 percent GHG reduction by 2030 recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to avoid the worst consequences of climate change;

- Achieving the County’s goal of meeting all electricity needs with 100 percent renewable energy by 2035; and
- Achieving carbon neutrality for County and APS operations no later than 2040.

The CAP and other planning documents will set more detailed goals and timelines.

We strongly support the draft Resolution’s call in #3 to disclose progress, barriers, and actions in response to barriers on an annual basis to the County Board. We also encourage the use of easily understood, yet meaningfully detailed “dashboard” reports on the County website and other venues to track progress on an ongoing basis. This transparency is essential to build and sustain public support and cooperation in helping meet our climate goals.

Climate Mitigation and Climate Resiliency - Since there continues to be some public confusion about these two themes of climate action and a false sense that they compete with each other rather than serving as essential co-elements to the climate crisis, we recommend that the Resolution clarifies this matter, perhaps by including the following

WHEREAS, climate mitigation (GHG reductions, clean energy) and climate resiliency actions (impact preparations, natural infrastructure enhancements) must be considered essential and complementary to comprehensively confronting climate change.

WHEREAS it is essential to protect and enhance the County’s natural elements and natural infrastructure (forests, tree canopy, native plants, stream and watersheds) to help buffer climate impacts and supplement climate solutions.

Arlington Public Schools - We urge you to visibly include our large school system - which includes educational learning, student and parent engagement, school facility management, bus transit system, school ground landscape management - into the Resolution. There is too much distance between County planning and budgeting for climate/environmental objectives and the APS. That disconnect is evident in the Resolution where schools are only softly referenced in the “whereas” section, and APS is not found anywhere in the Therefore section. APS must be more closely tied to the whole of government call to action.

Distribution of GHG reference - In the Whereas clause that states the distribution of GHG emissions between buildings, transportation, and waste.... “waste” needs to be clarified to mean “wastewater treatment.”

We hope these comments and recommendations are helpful to you, and we stand ready to strongly support this effort to its conclusion. Thank you.

Sincerely,

/s/_____

Elenor Hodges
Executive Director, EcoAction Arlington

Julie Rosenberg
Leader, Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Arlington Hub

Dean Amel
Chair, Sierra Club - Potomac River Group

cc: Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jennifer Fioretti, Assistant County Manager for Climate Action