



URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

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August 12, 2019

The Honorable Christian Dorsey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Community Energy Plan

Dear Chair Dorsey:

A member of the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) participated in the two “stakeholder” meetings in November 2018 and May 2019 on the update of the Community Energy Plan (CEP) and the UFC received a presentation on the latest draft of the plan at the July 25, 2019 meeting. We appreciate having this opportunity to share our views with you and the other members of the County Board.

While we applaud the work that has gone into the update, and appreciate the efforts to develop ambitious energy and carbon reduction goals, the commission has serious concerns about both the process and the resulting product. As an element of the comprehensive plan, the commission was surprised to see that limited input was sought from the broader public, relying instead on a small group of individuals with a very narrow scope of work. This was in significant contrast to the recent update of the Public Spaces Master Plan, another element of the comprehensive plan, that benefitted from extensive public outreach and input. As a result of this narrow focus on the CEP, some key environmental issues which have significant energy implications have not been adequately addressed, and in some instances, completely ignored.

Specifically, the UFC recommends the following changes to the CEP:

- 1) Energy conservation value of trees: During the development of the first Community Energy Plan adopted in 2013, there was extensive discussion recognizing the important value to energy conservation of mature trees by providing shade and cooling in the summer and windbreaks in the winter. These benefits were identified in addition to the significant contributions of trees for stormwater management, mitigation of the heat island effect, providing one of our most important carbon sinks and filtering air pollution. The UFC has noted anecdotal evidence of property owners cutting down mature trees to install solar panels, and the resulting negative implications for energy

conservation. The UFC recommends that the message of the energy conservation value of trees and that “trees trump solar” needs to be emphasized specifically in the plan and be a key factor in education and outreach.

- 2) Quantifying benefits of adding nature to the built environment: The UFC recommends that specific data about the energy and carbon capture benefits of the existing tree canopy, and the potential benefits of increased tree canopy, be included in the plan. The UFC especially feels strongly that the amount of carbon stored in trees—and the annual increase in the capture and storage of carbon by trees as they grow and as new ones are planted—should be rigorously quantified. Those numbers should then be specifically included in a new natural resources “wedge” in Arlington County’s chart showing the County’s plans for cutting carbon emissions and its path to the goal of carbon neutrality. It is important to acknowledge that tree growth has the potential to be a major contributor to reducing net carbon emissions and, as a result, should be an explicit component of the energy plan. Efforts to preserve existing natural areas, increase the tree canopy and add nature into the built environment are consistent with recommendation 3.3.1 of the Public Spaces Master Plan to explore joining the biophilic cities network, and should be cross-referenced in the CEP.
- 3) Land use and renewable energy production: There is no discussion in the plan of the tradeoffs of land use and renewable energy production. As was noted in the Public Spaces Master Plan, in a land-constrained community with a growing population there are important trade-offs in how all horizontal spaces are used. The UFC urges inclusion of the importance of sharing spaces for multiple uses, such as roof tops for gardens, storm water mitigation and solar panels on shade structures.
- 4) Equity and externalities: The issue of equity should not be limited to the boundaries of Arlington, especially given the recommendation that a significant amount of renewable energy is produced off-site. There needs to be some acknowledgement of the tradeoffs and externalities imposed on other communities when Arlington seeks to reach 100% renewable energy by saddling other communities with solar arrays, windmills and transmission lines. Recent news of hundreds of acres of nearby forests being cut down to build solar arrays highlights the issues of environmental degradation in pursuit of renewable energy. We object to an energy policy that makes us feel virtuous while imposing significant environmental damage elsewhere. A cost-benefit analysis of the loss of the myriad ecosystem services of existing trees and natural areas must be

factored into the equation, if we are to have a true understanding of the implications of our policy decisions.

In summary, the commission is concerned that narrow, short term energy conservation goals not undermine overall long-term energy conservation and environmental objectives. It is important to recognize that all of these choices have consequences and we need to more explicitly lay out the trade-offs inherent in our policy decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer, Chair
Urban Forestry Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Members, Arlington County Planning Commission
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Greg Emanuel, Director, Department of Environmental Services
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation