

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
c/o Department of Environmental Services
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705
Arlington, VA 22201

July 27, 2023

Natasha Alfonso-Ahmed, PLB Project Coordinator
Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development
Arlington County
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Comments on the Langston Boulevard Area Plan

Dear Ms Alfonso-Ahmed:

The Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2) endorses the vision outlined in the draft Langston Boulevard Area Plan of a vibrant, transit-oriented Green Main Street that connects residents, workers, and visitors to homes, shops, recreation, and transit. The focus on overall increasing density and creating activity hubs at key intersections, and replacing existing one- or two-story commercial buildings that have large surface parking lots with mixed-use development promotes more sustainable lifestyles by reducing per capita energy use in housing and transportation. The Plan also will provide a guide to achieving related sustainability features for a corridor-wide protected bike lane, improved pedestrian safety, tree-lined streets, parks, and essential stormwater infrastructure upgrades.

While impressive and comprehensive, C2E2 recommends that the Plan more clearly articulate how the proposed plan will achieve these interrelated sustainability goals that will help Arlington meet its goals for carbon neutrality, stormwater mitigation, and integration of nature into the urban design. A one-page narrative of the inter-related sustainability elements would help clarify the long-term goals for the Plan. To capture a truly 'Green Main Street' the Plan should highlight quantitatively and qualitatively:

- ***Opportunities to reduce impervious surfaces*** through redevelopment of car-oriented commercial areas into mixed-use activity areas that trade off more density from building up for additional pervious surfaces with extensive tree canopy coverage and open spaces. The Plan should identify opportunities to use tree canopy and native plant landscaping to also serve as a buffer for adjoining lower density neighborhoods.
- ***Preservation of existing multi-story buildings*** through adaptive reuse over redevelopment. The carbon footprint of demolishing a building and redeveloping can be quite high and undermines lifecycle reductions in greenhouse gas emissions even with zero emissions in operations. The Plan identifies many of the older multi-family buildings for redevelopment, including current market-rate affordable housing.

- **Expansion of tree canopy and green spaces.** While the plan calls for tree-lined streets and numerous parks throughout the corridor, calculations included in the Preliminary Concept Plan (PCP) suggest that actual impervious surfaces would increase under the redevelopment vision. Actual change is not clear as the PCP included rooftop gardens as plantable space, which overstated the amount of pervious surfaces and hid the impact of proposed redevelopment of the multi-storied residential buildings with larger building footprints at the expense of current tree canopy and pervious spaces. ***The plan should set a target that both preserves existing tree canopy and open spaces and expands the overall tree canopy coverage.***
- **Urban Heat Island Reduction.** To more clearly address a future of more extreme heat, the Plan should offer a holistic approach to avoiding the urban heat island impacts that could result from the proposed development. In addition to tree canopy coverage, green roofs, and other green infrastructure, the Plan should call for inclusion of a broader range of heat mitigation measures related to the design and placement of buildings and other hardscapes, including alternative building materials, reflective paints and coatings, and the consideration of building height, spacing, orientation, and configurations to minimize trapping heat in the urban matrix of the corridor. All options should be on the table in addressing this threat to public health and safety.
- **Zero energy or zero carbon buildings as the norm for the corridor.** While improvements to energy efficiency, decarbonization, renewable energy, and back-up batteries are identified as desired and to be encouraged, the plan should clearly state that new construction and redevelopment are expected to achieve high levels of energy efficiency, operate without the use of on-site fossil fuels through electrification of building systems and appliances and, where feasible, include rooftop solar to meet some or all of its electricity needs to align with the County's carbon neutrality goal. Charging infrastructure should also be expected to facilitate the transition to electric vehicles.
- **Stormwater mitigation.** The Plan should more clearly link current and anticipated requirements for upgrading the stormwater infrastructure to meet current conditions and mitigate the expected impact of increasingly severe storms.
- **Traffic mitigation.** The PCP projects that overall traffic volume along Langston Blvd would actually increase under the proposed plan albeit not as much as without proposed improvements. Continued or higher volumes of traffic undermines the intent to transform Langston Blvd into a walkable/bikeable Green Main Street, even with the proposed improvements to the streetscape, sidewalks, and bike lanes. The Plan should identify a pathway to making Langston Blvd people- rather than car-centric and promote transit, including microtransit and micromobility infrastructure to connect the corridor with nearby neighborhoods and routes connecting Falls Church and Fairfax County with the District of Columbia to help reduce pass through traffic.

C2E2 is also concerned that the Plan relies too heavily on developers to achieve its vision, creating the risk of piecemeal implementation of key elements of the Plan. We recommend that the Plan expand on how County programs, policy, regulations, and investments can be used to ensure that key goals of the plan are met. For example, the County could:

- Assist owners of existing market-rate affordable housing in planning renovations and tapping into available federal and other funding sources to improve energy efficiency and replace fossil-fuel systems and appliances with energy efficient electric equivalents in exchange for preserving affordable units.
- Develop incentives that would encourage developers to build to zero-energy or zero-carbon standards.
- Expand bus frequency and transit along Langston Blvd and nearby neighborhoods, including on-demand microtransit options, to connect to the activity hubs and elsewhere in Arlington and working with regional and other local jurisdictions to improve transit access and reduce drive-through traffic along Langston Blvd.
- Incorporate projects into the Capital Improvement Plan that will provide needed improvements to stormwater management and street improvements, including bike lanes and sidewalks, to complement community benefits provided by developers.
- Consider adopting a Form-Based Code that would expedite project approval for developers willing to adhere to the provisions identified in the Langston Boulevard Area Plan.

Sincerely,



Joan McIntyre

Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

CC: Arlington County Board

Anthony Fusarelli, CPHD Director

Devanshi Patel. Chair, Planning Commission