

TO: City Council

FROM: Joseph Schiarizzi, Chair, Environmental Sustainability Council (ESC)

SUBJECT: ESC Comments on FY2023 Budget

DATE: April 25, 2022

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The ESC is grateful for the opportunity to provide input on the FY23 Budget. When it comes to reducing City-wide energy consumption and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the ESC has been advising that City government should “Lead by Example.” Below, in order of priority, are budget process and staffing commitments that we believe are needed to cost-effectively implement a “Lead by Example” strategy:

1. **Energy Action Plan for Government and Schools.** Fund the currently unfunded \$50k for consultant services to develop government and schools’ operations energy action plan as soon as possible in FY23. With over half our emissions coming from FCCPS operations, an integrated approach is essential. The planning process should present City Council with pathways to achieve Net Zero GHG emissions on an accelerated timeline (by 2035, 2030, etc.). No comprehensive strategy will be funded until a Plan is adopted, so this is our first priority.
2. **Energy Manager.** Fund the currently unfunded Energy Manager position. This position will initially help identify government-wide energy-saving opportunities and understand utility tariffs, thus helping offset salary costs. It should allow the Government and Schools Action Plan to be developed in parallel with the community-wide Plan (CCMEAP), rather than afterward. The Manager will be in place to implement the Action Plan as soon as it is adopted, and could also help with planning for energy using systems, including hardware choices, such as HVAC, lighting, etc..
3. **Environmental Lens Evaluation.** We recommend that future budgets be developed and evaluated using an environmental lens, comparable to the approach adopted for CIP projects. Ideally, the Government Energy Plan and the CCMEAP would include this recommendation.
4. **Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO).** Promote ‘Environmental Programs Coordinator’ to new Director-level “CSO” position reporting directly to City Manager. Give CSO the mandate to guide City’s (public and private) response to climate and resiliency crises. Additional funding would be needed to compensate CSO for increased responsibility, which we estimate as an incremental increase of \$30,000.
5. **Higher-Quality Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs).** Fund purchase of higher quality RECs to offset City government and schools' carbon-emitting energy use. The City currently offsets 100% of government electricity use via purchase of RECs from Dominion. In 2021, RECs purchased by the City totaled approximately \$10,000 and were 100% generated by biomass-fired power plants, not necessarily located in Virginia. Generally, biomass RECs are generated by facilities that burn wood by-products and are not highly regarded for their environmental attributes (<https://www.virginiamercury.com/2021/05/21/lots-of-renewable-options-for-energy-consumers-but-why-are-few-of-them-any-good/>). Ideally, the Government and Schools Energy Plan would set criteria for the quality of any RECs used to meet GHG goals.

As always, the ESC is available to discuss our recommendations with Council, staff, and members of the Falls Church community, and we appreciate the opportunity to serve in our appointed advisory roles.