

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arlington maintains a rich variety of stable neighborhoods, quality schools and enlightened land use policies, and received the Environmental Protection Agency's highest award for "Smart Growth" in 2002.



Bluemont Junction Park

Arlington, Virginia is a world-class residential, business and tourist location that was originally part of the 10 miles square parcel of land surveyed in 1791 to be the nation's Capital. It is the geographically smallest self-governing county in the United States, occupying slightly less than 26 square miles. Arlington maintains a rich variety of stable neighborhoods, quality schools and enlightened land use policies, and received the Environmental Protection Agency's highest award for "Smart Growth" in 2002. Home to some of the most influential organizations in the world – including the Pentagon – Arlington stands out as one of America's preeminent places to live, visit and do business. The community is committed to smart growth, sustainability and inclusion. Plans for community growth involve not only mixed use transit-oriented development, but also neighborhood conservation and one of the country's premier programs in affordable housing.

Arlington is nationally recognized for the quality and diversity of its park and recreation and arts offerings. Arlington was recently selected by Sports Illustrated and the National Recreation and Park Association as the Sportstown for the Commonwealth of Virginia. The County was selected as one of four communities (the others being Houston, Minneapolis and San Diego) to participate in a grant study awarded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to investigate the

relationship between health and local park and recreation uses in adults age 50 and older. In the past, Arlington was selected by the National Institutes of Health (through the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute) and NRPA to be one of two pilot programs for the Hearts in Parks initiative. The County also received Innovations Awards for its Arts Incubator and Bilingual Outreach programs.

The quantity of public spaces is a perennial issue in a community as small and densely developed as Arlington. However, the primary challenge in the coming decades will be to address the qualitative issues of our public space system, such as strengthening the connection between people and parks, optimizing the sustainable use of resources in the county, ensuring the involvement of all residents, and supporting a healthy natural and cultural environment. This focus will be necessary in order to sustain the County's traditional high level of service while adjusting to changing socioeconomic factors and an increased demand for both programming and natural spaces.

The **2005 Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP)** is a replacement for the 1994 *Open Space Master Plan*. The PSMP is primarily a planning document that identifies the major public space needs of the community. It is one of eight critical components of the county's comprehensive plan. As a planning document, the themes and recommendations provide the framework to guide the stewardship of Arlington's precious

public spaces for future generations to enjoy. This master plan makes recommendations echoing the values and priorities that the community places on diverse leisure opportunities, while recognizing economic and resource constraints. Implementation of the recommendations is subject to the County's future funding and resource allocations and priorities.

VISION

Arlington's vision for public spaces builds upon the central concepts of the County's vision statement that is highlighted below. Public spaces sustain a community and strengthen its identity by providing the common ground where diverse people can interact and come together to build the meaningful connections that are important to healthy community and civic life. Attractive, well conceived public spaces and the programs and activities that they support are key catalysts for community education, energy and growth. In a densely urban community, public spaces also protect natural areas and provide the environmental balance and relief so vital to long-term sustainability.

The three aspects of the County's vision most relevant to public spaces are:

Community Health and Quality of Life: Public spaces are the unifying element in the community and critical to ensuring a healthful environment and a high quality of life. They provide relief from the stresses of urban density, protect the natural ecosystem, enhance air and water quality, preserve habitat that

supports a rich diversity of plants and animals, and protect and restore waterways essential to the environmental health of the community and region.

Connecting Community: Arlington's public spaces connect people to people and provide a "common ground" where people of diverse backgrounds and interests can reinforce a shared identity as Arlingtonians. Public spaces also connect residents and visitors with natural resources and link habitats through wildlife corridors. Trails and stream valleys have the added benefits of linking Arlington with nearby jurisdictions.

Accessibility and Inclusion for

Everyone: Physical access to public spaces is, of course, basic. The ability of all persons to enjoy public spaces should be a focal point of design, going beyond the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. No less important is access for low income Arlingtonians and for those living in high density areas. These elements of the population use public spaces as a necessary extension of their living space. The County's assurance of well distributed public spaces will respond to those needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The County has a strong established system of public spaces. The real challenge over the next ten to twenty years will be to balance existing resources and programs with new and changing needs, striking the right balance among a broad range of competing interests. To achieve that, this plan recommends that the County focus on six specific objectives summarized

below that will drive future decision making. There are also five recommendations that appear after the objectives and are listed on page 9.

**OBJECTIVE ONE:
Balance Acquisition and Development of Public Spaces**

The County has a strong system of parks and recreation facilities, but the community has expressed a clear, documented need for additional aquatic facilities, fitness space, teen centers, athletic facilities, and arts and multi-purpose spaces, along with more trails and natural areas. High-priority actions to attain this objective include implementing the North Tract Master Plan, planning and developing public spaces along Four Mile Run and in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor, and developing strategies for land acquisition and the location of facilities.

**OBJECTIVE TWO:
Preserve and Enhance the Environment**

Creating and preserving natural spaces is a top priority for the community, to be emphasized in designing a new park, developing facilities or acquiring land. This objective focuses on developing policy and management plans to protect and manage natural resources and enhance the County's commitment to "Green" practices.

**OBJECTIVE THREE:
Improve Access and Usability**

The community must be able to get to public spaces to use them. This objective encompasses ensuring access that meets the spirit as well as the letter of the Americans with Disabilities Act; ensuring that facilities can be reached by multiple means of transportation; creating more linkages through the trail system; and reducing economic barriers to enjoyment of these county spaces and resources.

**OBJECTIVE FOUR:
Enhance Arts, Culture and History**

Arlington has established itself throughout the region and nation as a community that offers unique, dynamic arts activities and one that provides focused attention to historic preservation. This objective focuses on developing a major arts and cultural center preferably at Courthouse Plaza, and on promoting the integration of cultural and historic components in a broad range of spaces and programs.

**OBJECTIVE FIVE:
Develop and Enhance Partnerships**

Over the years, Arlington has developed a number of partnerships that enhance the amount of available public space and program offerings. The County needs to continue to create and expand partnerships with Arlington Public Schools and other government, private and non-profit organizations. This objective is to be met by developing a partnership policy to guide future decisions, by maximizing existing partnerships, and by reviewing and updating all agreements.

**OBJECTIVE SIX:
Manage Assets Effectively**

The County has established a full complement of facilities and program offerings. This objective involves enhancing how the assets are designed, funded, maintained and managed. Recommended actions include improving program operations, including pricing and cost recovery, and developing a technology plan.



Hayes Park Spray Garden

These five key recommendations should receive special focus as the County's highest public space priorities:

1. **Fully implement the North Tract Master Plan.** The County is creating a major legacy through development of this new 30-acre gateway park with spectacular views and signature recreational facilities. The first phase is funded and currently in design. The County should pursue a full range of municipal marketing and joint development opportunities to complete the second phase of the park.
2. **Develop a land acquisition policy** that establishes criteria for evaluating acquisition opportunities and strategies for acquiring critical parcels of public space.
3. **Focus on public space as a key aspect of the current planning efforts for the Four Mile Run restoration planning** with the City of Alexandria and the Shirlington Village and Nauck areas, with a particular focus on acquisition and major enhancement of public spaces along the stretch of the Four Mile Run corridor from Barcroft Park to the Potomac River. The long-term plan should emphasize the development of public spaces as important recreational, cultural and environmental connectors.

4. **Inventory the County's natural resources and create a natural resource policy and management plan.** The County lacks a county-wide data base of natural resources, including flora, fauna, and habitat evaluations. These resources need to be evaluated, their significance rated, and a plan developed to manage and protect them.
5. **Maximize the partnership with Arlington Public Schools.** While the County and Schools already have an established cooperative relationship at many indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, a significant opportunity exists to enhance community use of these assets when they are not being used for their primary mission of education.



Community Canine Area



North Tract Public Meeting

KEY TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Page Number(s)
Objective One – Balance Acquisition and Development of Public Spaces	
1.1 Build North Tract*	40, 44
1.2 Develop a Land Acquisition Policy*	41, 44
1.3 Emphasize Planning and Improvement of Lower Four Mile Run*	42, 44
1.4 Focus on Planning for the Rosslyn Ballston Corridor	44
1.5 Develop a Clustering Policy	44
1.6 Complete a Detailed Analysis of Indoor Centers	45
1.7 Optimize Creative Use of Open Spaces	45
1.8 Ensure Potomac River Access	45
1.9 Provide Increased Access to Comfort Facilities	45
Objective Two – Preserve and Enhance the Environment	
2.1 Create a Natural Resource Policy and Management Plan*	43, 46
2.2 Enhance Tree Canopies and Natural Buffers	46
2.3 Preserve and Enhance Existing Natural Areas	46
2.4 Pursue Use of Easements to Protect Natural Areas and Heritage Resources	46
2.5 Manage Natural Areas to Maintain Diverse Habitats	47
2.6 Continue to Move Towards More “Green” Practices	48
2.7 Develop and Implement a Green Infrastructure Plan	48
Objective Three – Improve Access and Usability	
3.1 Makes Public Spaces Usable for People of All Abilities	48
3.2 Update and Implement Trail Systems Management	49
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Objective Four – Enhance Arts, Culture and History	
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4.2 Focus on Arts, Cultural and Historical Elements	50
Objective Five – Develop and Enhance Partnerships	
5.1 Maximize the Partnership with Arlington Public Schools*	43, 50
5.2 Create and Implement a Partnership Policy	50
5.3 Create a Partnership Plan with Managers of Federal Lands	51
5.4 Review and Update all other Agreements	51
Objective Six – Manage Assets Effectively	
6.1 Evaluate Controls and Methods for Pricing and Cost Recovery	51
6.2 Create a Life-Cycle Costing Assessment	51
6.3 Create a Technology Investment Plan	52
6.4 Create Alternative Funding Policies and Resources	52
6.5 Create Facility Design Standards Guidelines	52
6.6 Update and Manage all Policies, Guidelines and Maintenance Standards	52
6.7 Implement a Five-Year Master Planning Schedule	52

* One of the top five priority recommendations

WHAT IS IN THE PUBLIC SPACES MASTER PLAN?

Chapter 1: Past and Present – The Planning Context

This chapter briefly describes the Public Spaces Master Plan. This chapter provides a history of Arlington’s public spaces, outlines the purpose of the plan and its relationship to other comprehensive plan elements and related planning tools, and recognizes the many significant objectives that have been realized since the 1994 *Open Space Master Plan*.

Chapter 2: Community Profile and Trends

Arlington’s neighborhoods and demographics are continuing to evolve as the community becomes more urban. This chapter discusses the demographic profile of the community; national leisure trends that influence the field of parks, recreation and public space management; and important findings developed through facilitated community involvement throughout the process.

Chapter 3: Overview of Existing and Planned Public Spaces

This chapter provides an overview of current public spaces, including County, regional, federal and private spaces and facilities.

Chapter 4: Administration and Planning

This chapter provides a brief description of the administration, financing, land acquisition, and planning considerations for public spaces and a benchmarking analysis.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Six objectives, each with a set of recommendations and actions, are proposed to guide Arlington County toward implementing the plan. Five key priority recommendations are highlighted to receive the highest public space priorities.

Appendices

The appendices include specific information that supports the plan.



Courthouse Plaza