

Arlington County

Forestry and Natural Resources Plan

Online Engagement Summary

Opportunity open from 11/10/2020 - 12/23/2020

ARLINGTON
VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF
PARKS AND RECREATION



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OVERVIEW

Arlington County formally kicked off the [Forestry and Natural Resources Plan](#) (FNRP) project in fall of 2020. Following initial briefings with Arlington County Board Members and various commissions, the first public online engagement opportunity was launched and widely promoted across the County. Between November 10 and December 23, 2020, community members were encouraged to learn about the current state of Arlington’s urban forests and natural resources, share how they currently experience the County’s natural places and spaces, and offer a vision for the future.

The engagement opportunity was offered through three separate questionnaires through the County’s online tool, 76Engage. Participants could choose to complete any combination of the three questionnaire options and were able to do so either anonymously or by filling out a profile through the tool. The three questionnaire topics were:

- Nature in Arlington- This overarching questionnaire mainly focused on topic prioritization, general likes and dislikes, and visioning for the future.
- Natural Areas- Questions here touched on traditional natural areas such as forests/ woods, meadows, and streams. Participants were asked to share thoughts about favorite activities, attractions, quantity, quality, and barriers.
- Tree Canopy- Participants were encouraged to share their opinion on the quantity and quality of trees in various areas across the County. They were also asked to share their thoughts on conservation, expansion, and opportunities for people who own land in Arlington.

Feedback gathered from all three questionnaires are part of an early phase of community engagement for this project. These community comments will help inform the development of the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan.

PARTICIPATION & OUTREACH

PARTICIPATION

TABLE 1: FNRP Online Engagement Participation

QUESTIONNAIRE	NUMBER OF SUBMISSIONS
Nature in Arlington	384
Natural Areas	341
Tree Canopy	356
TOTAL	1,018
Approximate Number of Participants	576

Table 1 shows the number of participants who submitted responses for each questionnaire. Due to the ability for participants to complete questionnaires anonymously, it is difficult to determine how individuals chose to participate. Some may have only completed one questionnaire while others may have completed all three. As a result, the table tracks the total number of submissions (1,018). The approximate number of participants were determined by tracking the different number of Internet Protocol (IP) addresses.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

The project team used traditional and creative communications practices in order to spread awareness of this online engagement opportunity. The Forestry and Natural Resources plan webpage, projects.arlingtonva.us/FNRP, was launched as the landing page for all project resources in fall of 2020. Community members were and are encouraged to sign up for updates through that webpage. When the online engagement opportunity was launched, messages were sent through the project email list, the [Inside Arlington](#) newsletter, the [Engage Arlington webpage](#), Parks & Recreation’s community eNews, County social media channels, and more. All of the civic association presidents and many community leaders were asked to share the engagement with their networks.



Image 1

A [promotional video](#) (Image 1) reached almost 10,000 views between YouTube and Facebook. Articles by [ArlingtonNow](#) and the Society of American Foresters also helped spread the word.

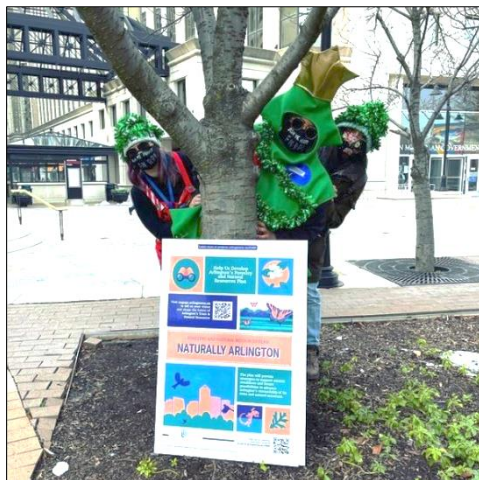


Image 2

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in difficulties reaching people in person, but project team members engaged with community members through a holiday-themed social media campaign where the masked and socially distant “Fores-TREE Squad” (Image 2) visited parks with high volumes of foot traffic. Park goers were encouraged to visit the website or scan a QR code with their phones from a distance in order to access the engagement opportunities and share their thoughts. People who followed the Parks & Recreation Facebook or Instagram page could follow along on the Fores-TREE Squad’s adventures and interact through social media stories.

KEY FINDINGS

The following graphs represent feedback gathered from multiple choice questions across the three questionnaires. Click on the hyperlinks below to quickly access them:

Nature in Arlington

- [Figure 1](#): Which of the following come to mind when you think of trees and other natural resources (e.g., air, soil, water, wildlife, etc.) in Arlington?
- [Figure 2](#): Rank the following topics in regard to Arlington's trees and other natural resources

Natural Areas

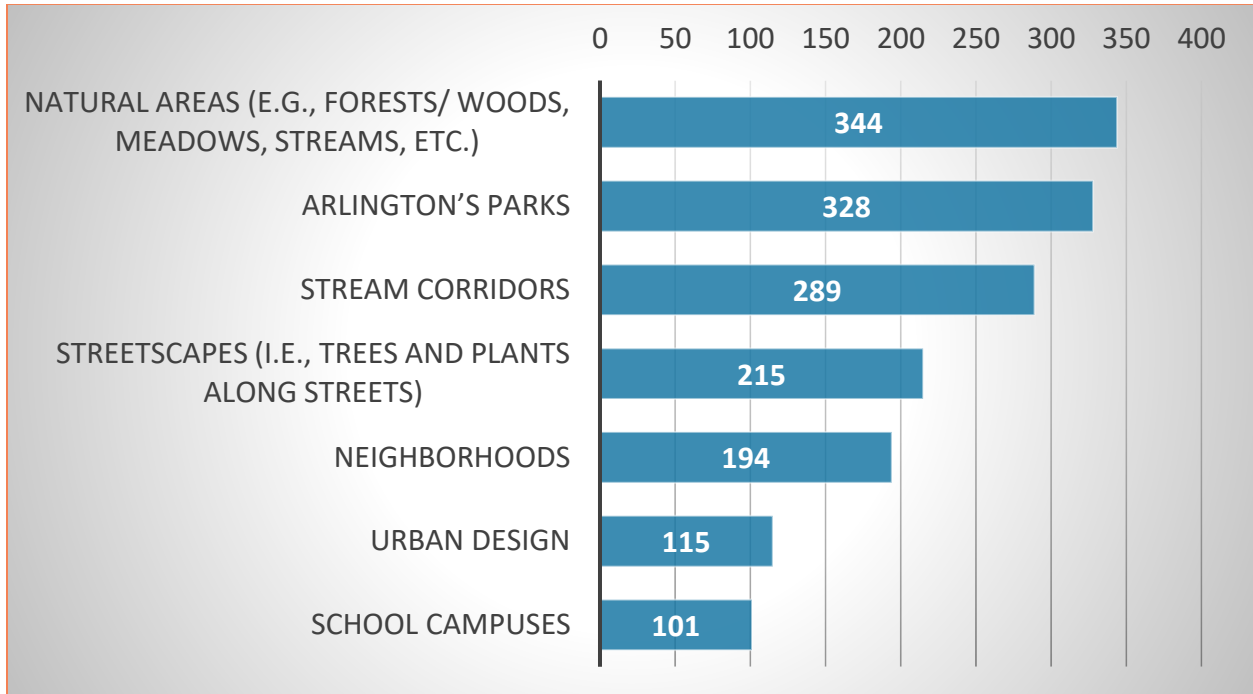
- [Figure 3](#): How frequently do you visit Arlington's natural areas (e.g., forests/ woods, meadows, streams, etc.)?
- [Figure 4](#): What are your favorite types of natural areas to visit?
- [Figure 5](#): What activities do you like to do most in these natural areas?
- [Figure 6](#): What attracts you most to these natural areas?
- [Figure 7](#): Generally, how do you feel about the AMOUNT of natural areas in Arlington?
- [Figure 8](#): Generally, how do you feel about the QUALITY of natural areas in Arlington?
- [Figure 9](#): What is the biggest barrier you face when it comes to experiencing nature in Arlington?

Tree Canopy

- [Figure 10](#): In my opinion, the QUANTITY of trees in the following spaces are:
- [Figure 11](#): In my opinion, the QUALITY of trees in the following spaces are:
- [Figure 12](#): If you own land in Arlington, what obstacles limit your ability to plant trees?

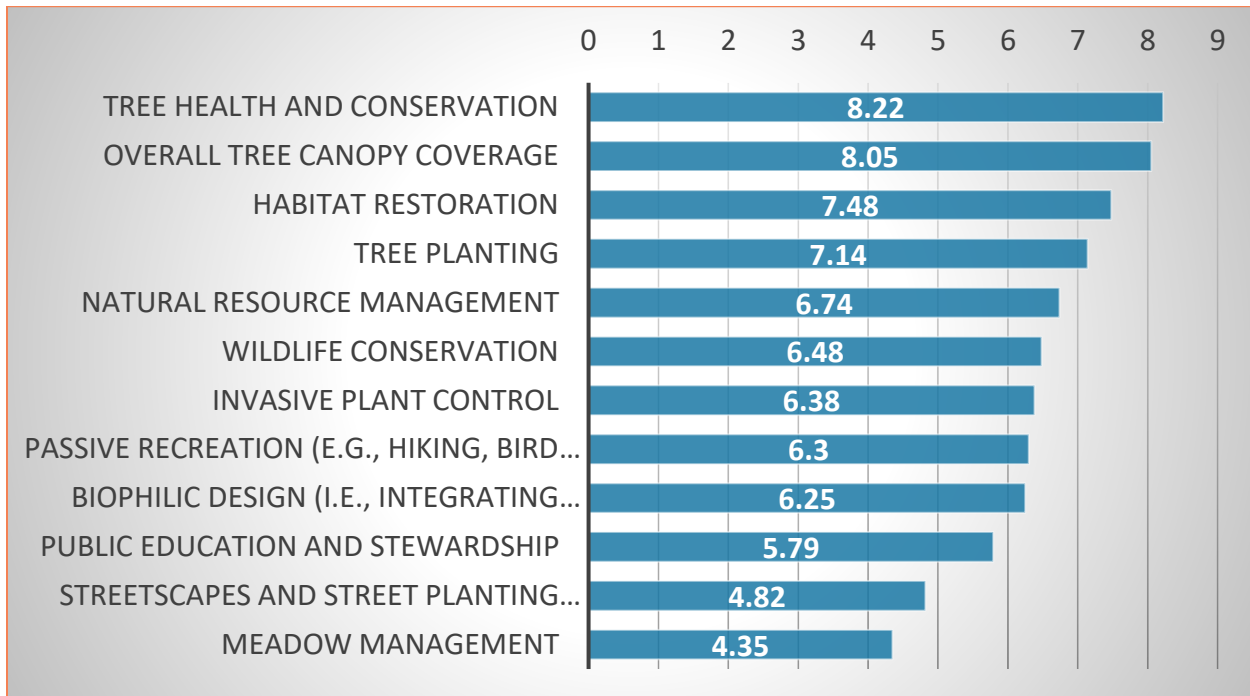
KEY FINDINGS: Nature in Arlington

Figure 1: Which of the following come to mind when you think of trees and other natural resources (e.g., air, soil, water, wildlife, etc.) in Arlington?



Other mentions (in order of frequency): neighboring property, development and housing, wildlife, biophilic design, community or private gardens, ecosystems and habitats, planning, trails, public health benefits, county parks and land, educational opportunities, stormwater management, tree loss, noise and light pollution, and open space.

Figure 2: Rank the following topics in regard to Arlington’s trees and other natural resources



Other mentions (in order of frequency): wildlife management and habitats, stormwater management, development and zoning regulations, educational opportunities and stewardship, maintenance and management, active recreation, tree canopy, climate change and sustainability, native species, private land owners, accessibility and connectivity of trails, impervious surfaces, planting, planning, land acquisition and expansion, biophilic design, open space, environmental justice, fiscal stewardship and funding, utilities, inventive, public health, volunteering and engagement, political values, community gardens, and partnerships.

KEY FINDINGS: Natural Areas

Figure 3: How frequently do you visit Arlington’s natural areas (e.g., forests/ woods, meadows, streams, etc.)?

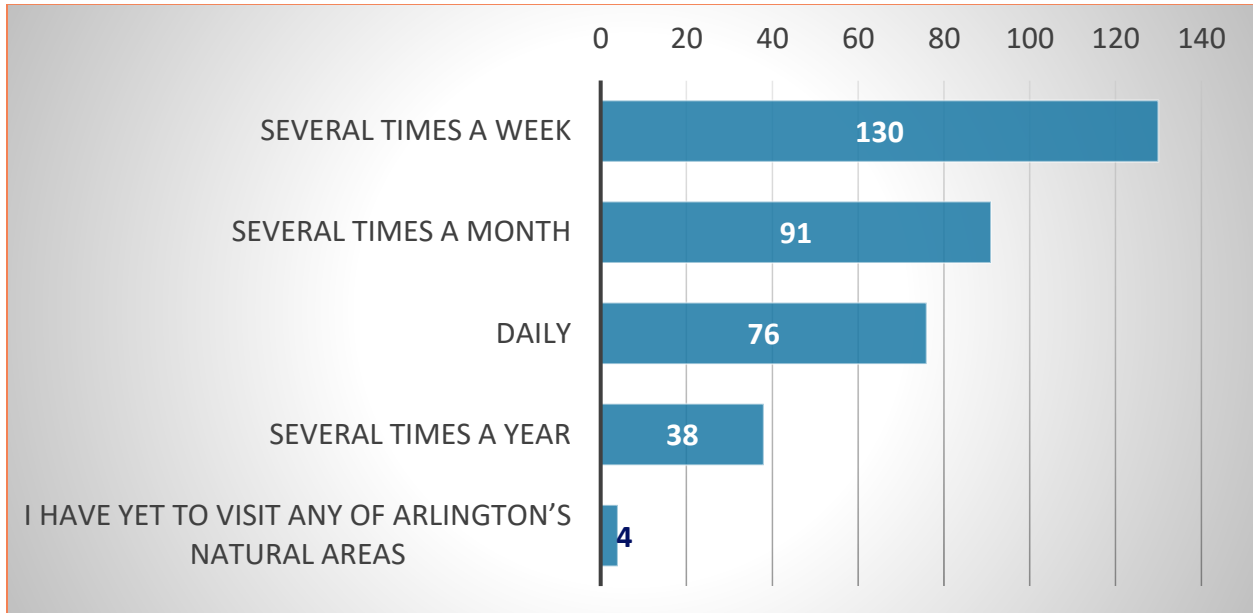
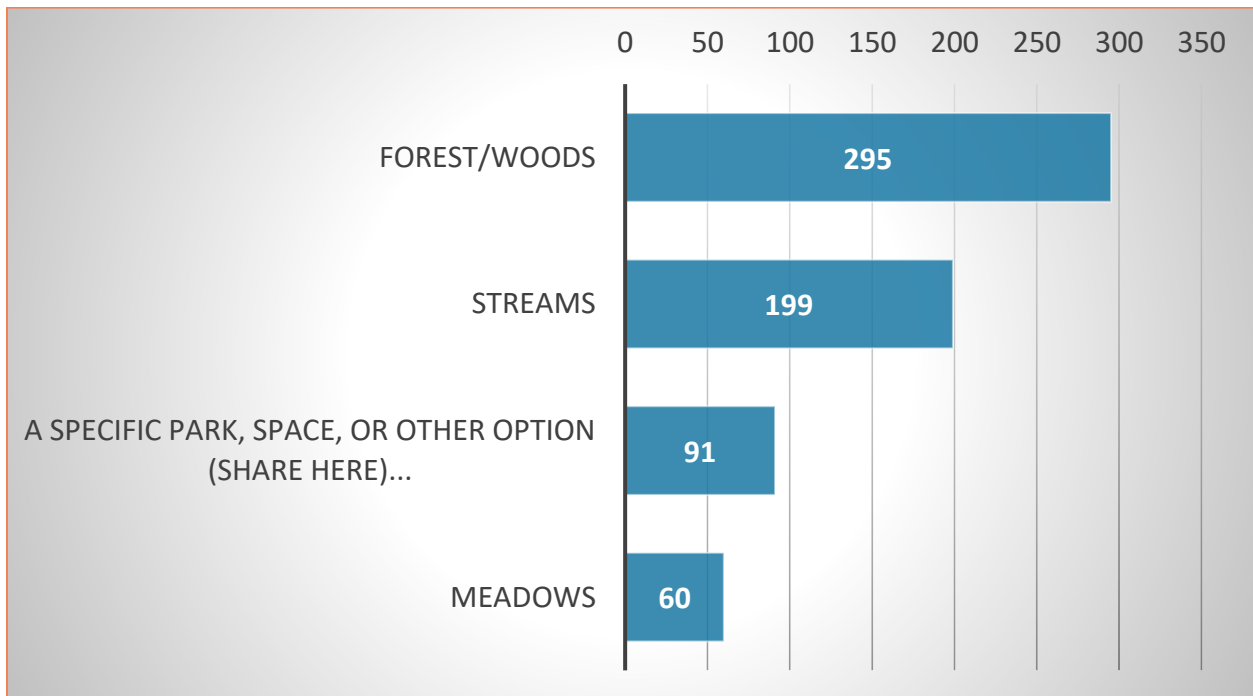
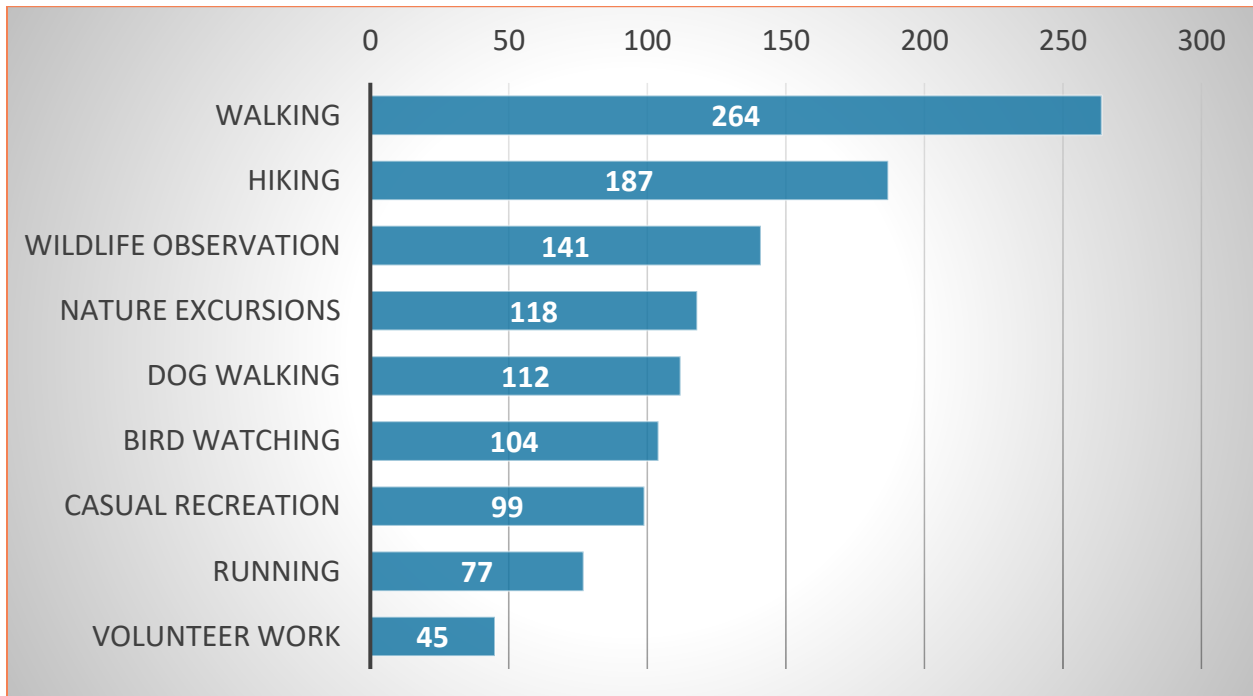


Figure 4: What are your favorite types of natural areas to visit?
(Check all that apply)



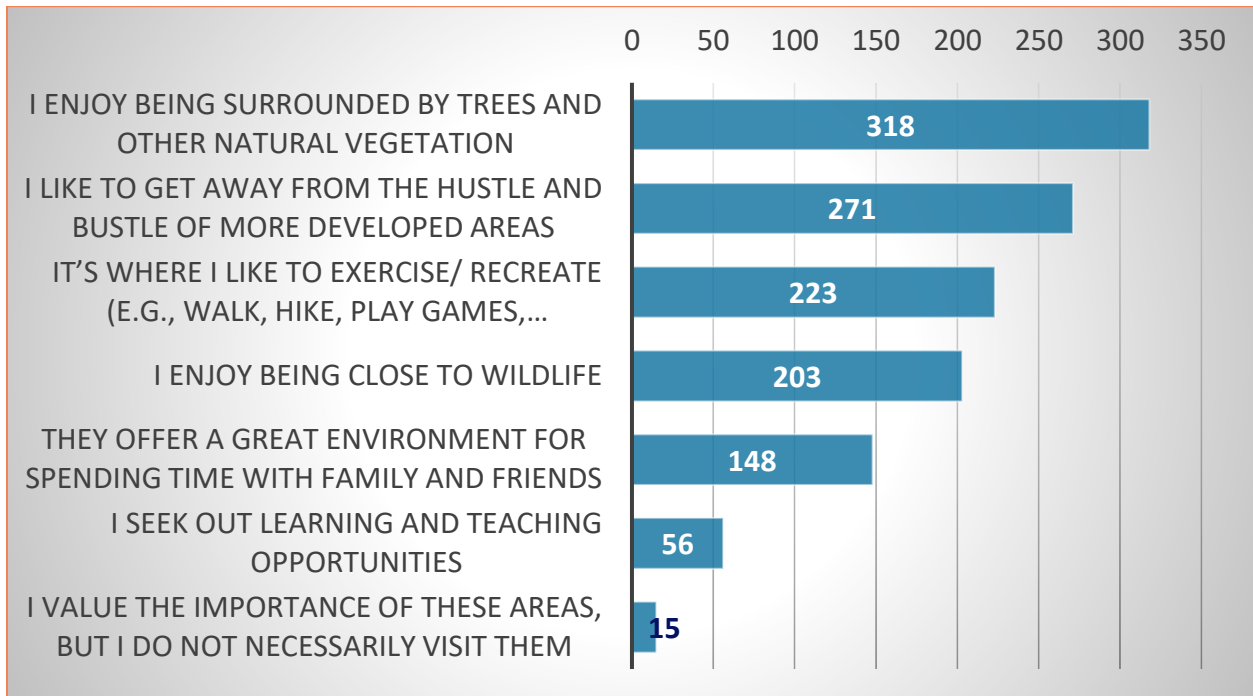
**Figure 5: What activities do you like to do most in these natural areas?
(Check all that apply)**



Other mentions (in order of frequency): biking, relaxing, foraging*, learning, fishing*, group meetings, scootering, and playing with dogs.

**County policy does not currently allow these activities.*

Figure 6: What attracts you most to these natural areas?
(Check all that apply)



Other mentions (in order of frequency): mental health benefits, opportunities for exploration, access to natural spaces, recreation, educational experiences, and advocacy.

Figure 7: Generally, how do you feel about the AMOUNT of natural areas in Arlington?

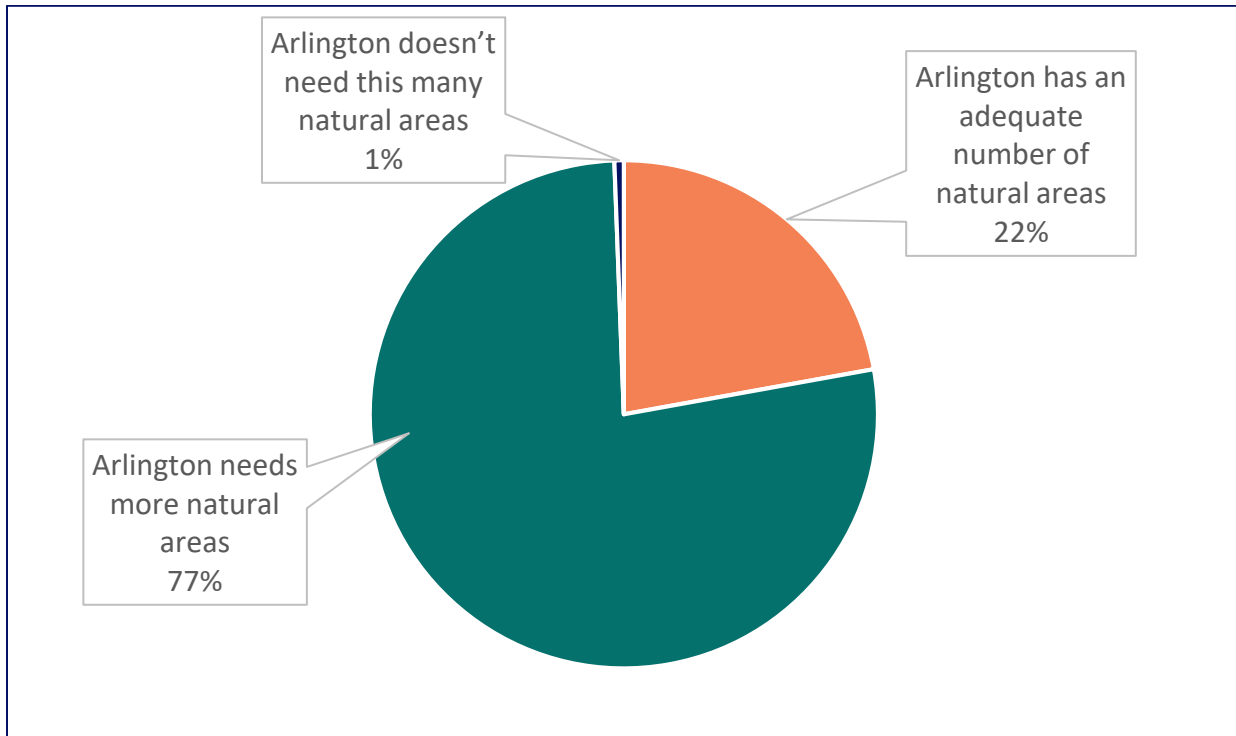


Figure 8: Generally, how do you feel about the QUALITY of natural areas in Arlington?

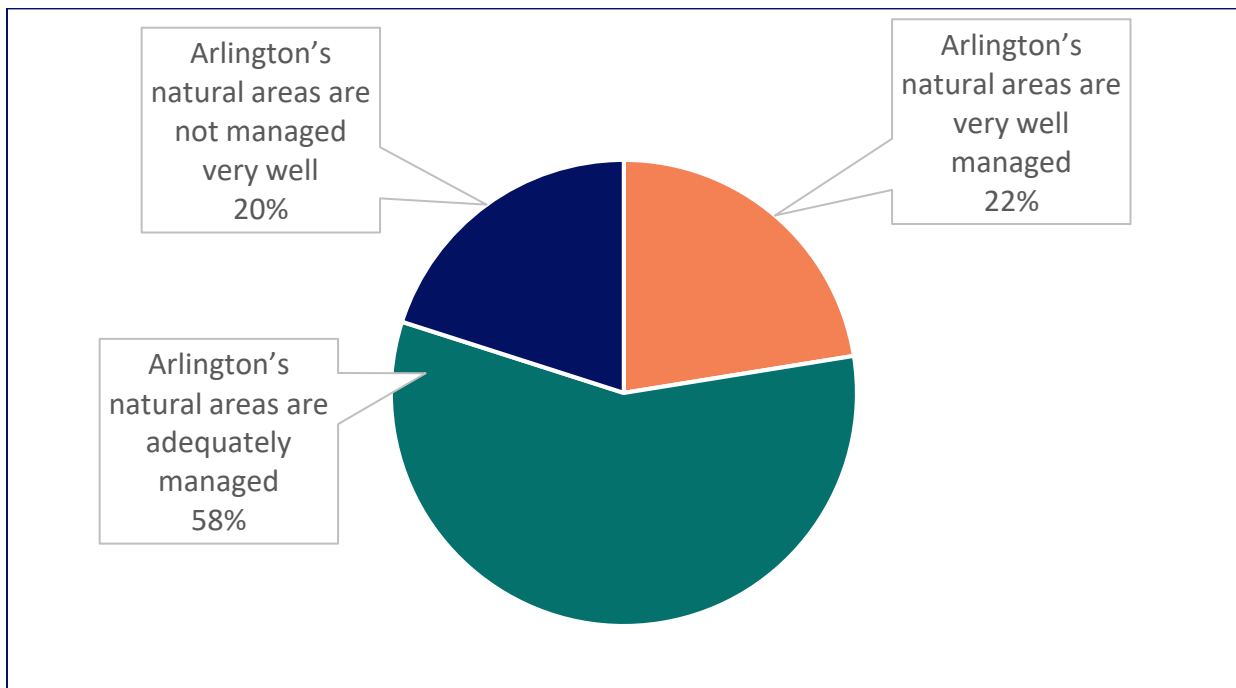
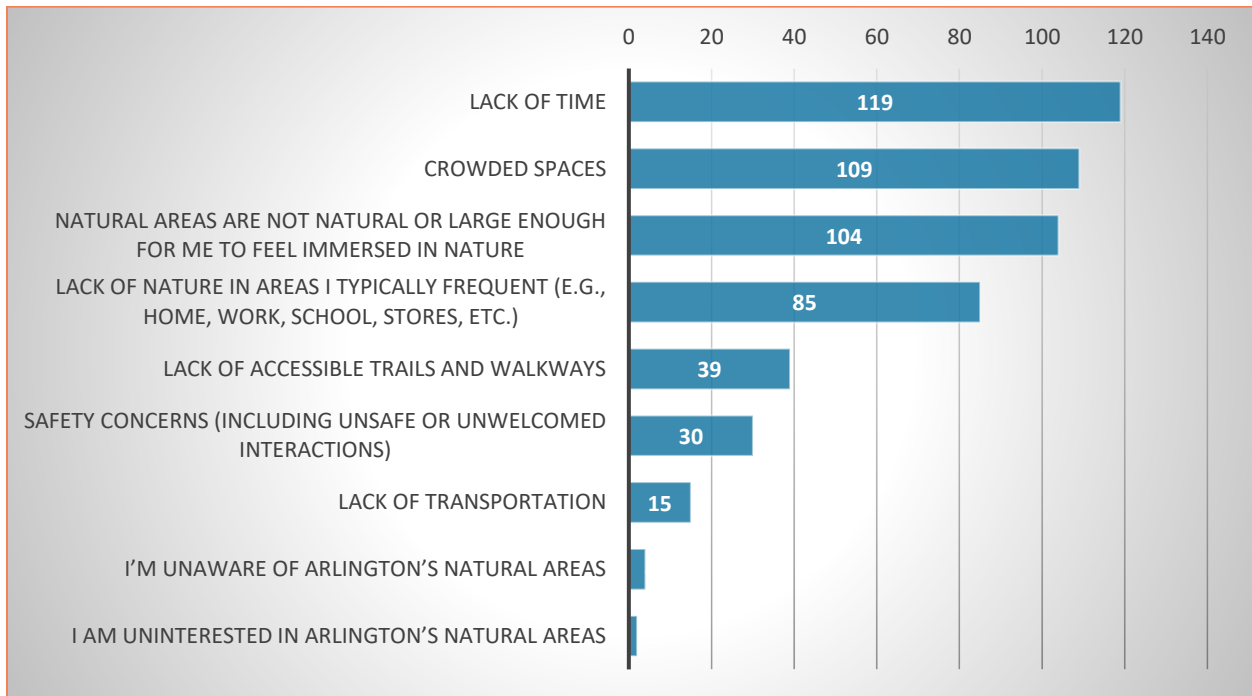


Figure 9: What is the biggest barrier you face when it comes to experiencing nature in Arlington? (Check all that apply)



Other mentions (in order of frequency): development, biking rules, accessibility and connectivity of trails, parking, recreators, maintenance and management, dogs being off-leash in the parks, lack of awareness, and safety.

KEY FINDINGS: Tree Canopy

Figure 10: In my opinion, the **QUANTITY** of trees in the following spaces are:

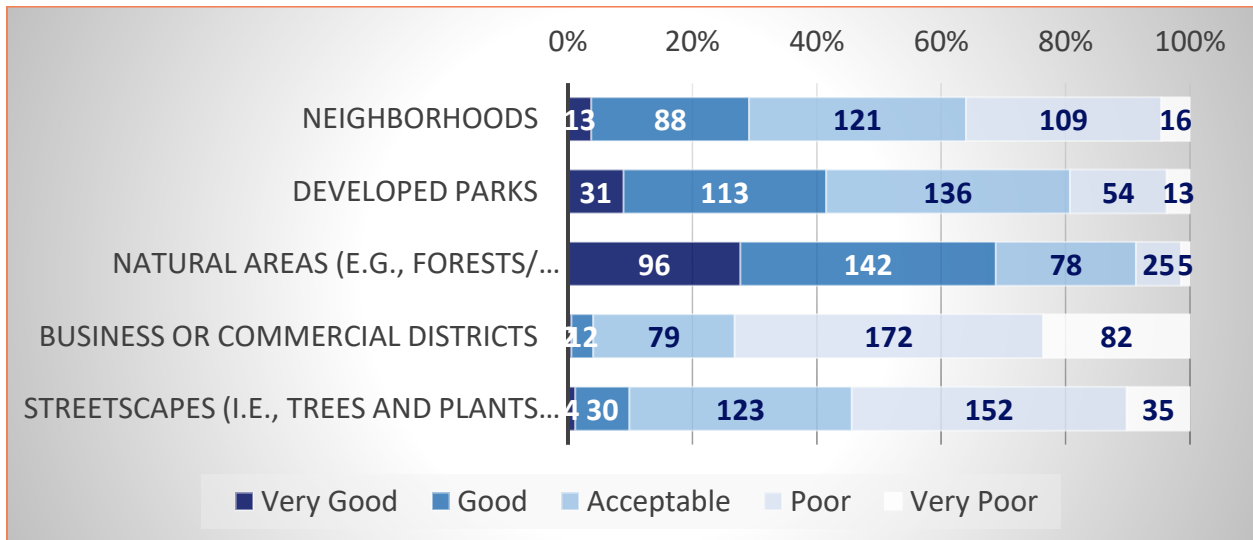
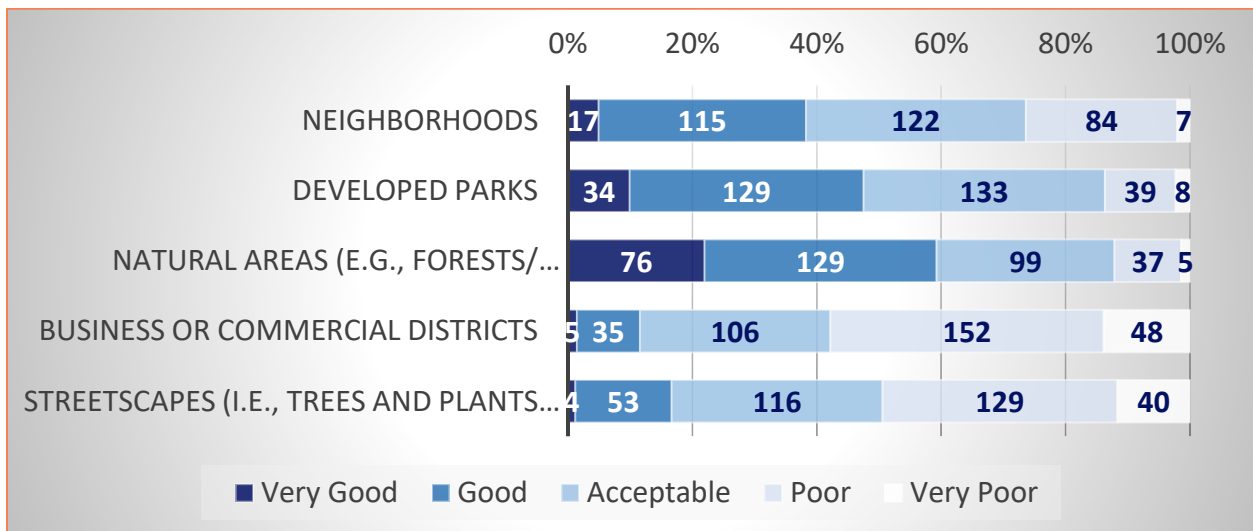
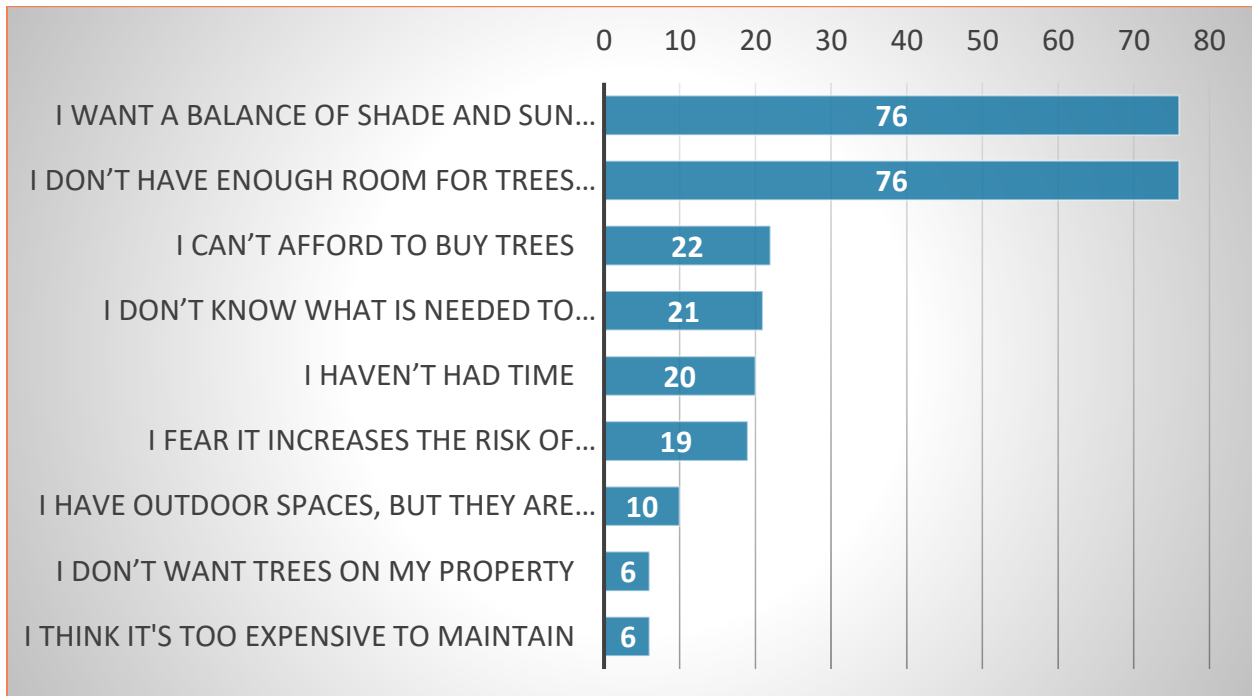


Figure 11: In my opinion, the **QUALITY** of trees in the following spaces are:



**Figure 12: If you own land in Arlington, what obstacles limit your ability to plant trees?
(Check all that apply)**



Other mentions (in order of frequency): space is limited because there are already too many trees and plants on property, utility issues, impacts on neighbors, home owners and condo association restrictions, lack of education, living in a multi-family building or not owning property with land, it takes too much work or money, maintenance needs, being restricted from the free tree program, it could be unsafe or cause damage to property, impacts on wildlife, there is an easement on the property, and it lowers property value.

MAJOR THEMES

Across the three online questionnaires—Nature in Arlington, Natural Areas, and Tree Canopy—the community offered nearly 3,500 open ended comments to various questions. Each comment was tagged and categorized, and a number of common themes emerged across responses— many of which intersected with one another. Because each comment may have related to more than one theme, the following findings are based off how many times a topic was mentioned.

In this section, you'll find an overview of the top six themes that emerged from the comments. Comments included observations and praise of some current practices, concerns for the current and future state of our forestry and natural resources, and suggestions to be considered when developing the FNRP. Each theme is accompanied by sub-bullets that capture the sentiments participants commonly shared. Click on the themes below to jump ahead:

- [THEME 1](#): Improve Planting Practices
- [THEME 2](#): Discourage or Limit Development
- [THEME 3](#): Strengthen Zoning Ordinances & Regulations
- [THEME 4](#): Improve Maintenance & Management Practices
- [THEME 5](#): Manage & Protect Wildlife
- [THEME 6](#): Educate & Foster Stewardship
- [Honorable Mentions](#) (other themes that were mentioned at least 100 times)

THEME 1: Improve Planting Practices

Approximate # of Mentions: 603

The most frequently mentioned theme across all three questionnaires was about making sure planting in Arlington is successful. Some participants were critical of the County's current planting practices— sharing that some plants are not able to develop through they're intended lifecycle due to inadequate conditions of their environments. While people want to see more plants and vegetation, it's equally, if not more important, that they have the best chance of survival and growing to their most healthy and mature states. While enhancing the quality of plants and natural resources on public property, community members want the County to encourage private property owners to do the same by providing accessible and widely promoted educational programs.

THEME 1 SUB-BULLETS

- Plant more trees with the best chance of survival
- Replacing mature trees with small trees is not sufficient

- Educate private property owners about planting/ caring for trees
- Increase the number of trees in developed and commercial areas
- Advertise Tree Canopy Fund and free tree programs better
- Acquire more County owned land to expand natural space

THEME 2: Discourage or Limit Development

Approximate # of Mentions: 459

Participants recognize competing desires for more greenspace and the need to accommodate Arlington’s growing population with more development. Community members voiced concern over excessive paving primarily brought on by developers and single-family homeowners building large houses on small lots. Opinions ranged from wanting to limit development with policies and ordinances to discouraging development all together. People generally feel that current ordinances do not do enough to preserve existing trees, encourage biophilic design, or conserve and expand green space. If land supply has to compete with more development, community members prefer building up rather than building out.

THEME 2 SUB-BULLETS

- 2.1 Find ways to discourage or limit development and impervious surfaces
- 2.2 Discourage or limit infill development
- 2.3 Promote higher density to preserve green space
- 2.4 Offer incentives and tax credits for conservation efforts
- 2.5 Discourage development of large homes on small lots

THEME 3: Strengthen Zoning Ordinances & Regulations

Approximate # of Mentions: 420

Community members encouraged the County to identify areas of opportunity where Arlington can work in partnership with developers to have a positive impact on trees and natural resources. By strengthening zoning ordinances and regulations, the County can enhance tree protections and replanting practices. Participants encouraged the development of incentives, tax credits and penalties that may help conserve and expand Arlington’s natural places and spaces.

THEME 3 SUB-BULLETS

- 3.1 Increase or strengthen requirements for tree protection
- 3.2 Increase or strengthen requirements for tree replacement

- 3.3 Place restrictions on single-family home sizes
- 3.4 Place restrictions on planting invasive species
- 3.5 Reduce the size of mowed buffers/land
- 3.6 Increase the sizes of setbacks
- 3.7 Create better partnerships with developers

THEME 4: Improve Maintenance & Management Practices

Approximate # of Mentions: 352

Quite a few people applauded Arlington staff on maintenance and management practices, but still voiced a few opportunities for improvement. These included more funding for maintenance overall, educating homeowners and the general public on how they can also help maintain natural resources, strengthening partnerships with community organizations that create volunteer opportunities, and spreading awareness about how people can become natural resource stewards. People would also like to see an expanded and well-maintained trail system that offers more connectivity between parks and equitable access to natural corridors for people who may not live close by.

THEME 4 SUB-BULLETS

- 4.1 Invest in better maintenance practices
- 4.2 Educate the public on maintenance practices
- 4.3 Promote opportunities and partnerships to expand conservation efforts
- 4.4 Remove invasive plants and encourage native plantings
- 4.5 Improve management and connectivity of trails

THEME 5: Manage & Protect Wildlife

Approximate # of Mentions: 264

Wildlife and habitats were among the most mentioned natural resources across the questionnaires. People mentioned negative impacts of the growing deer population and the need for an effective management plan. The same goes for some insects and other wildlife. This will require striking a balance between managing negative impacts of wildlife while also protecting habitats so they can be a benefit to Arlington's ecosystem.

THEME 5 SUB-BULLETS

- 5.1 Control deer and other animal species of concern

- 5.2 Protect trees from pests and diseases
- 5.3 Promote and restore pollinator populations
- 5.4 Promote cohabitation as much as possible
- 5.5 Protect wildlife habitat

THEME 6: Educate & Foster Stewardship

Approximate # of Mentions: 255

Education and stewardship were mentioned many times in a few different contexts. One is that the County should continue to educate homeowners about how to maintain a healthy natural environment through new and existing programs. Another is to work in partnership with Arlington Public Schools and youth-related community programs to build a pipeline towards environmental stewardship. In addition, community members also stressed the importance of educating others about how to better access nature and bring more opportunities directly to those who are not as easily able to access them.

THEME 6 SUB-BULLETS

- 6.1 Educate homeowners about programs and maintenance
- 6.2 Promote educational and volunteer opportunities widely
- 6.3 Prioritize equitable distribution and access of natural spaces
- 6.4 Integrate forestry and natural resources education into APS curriculum
- 6.5 Partner with local organizations who educating the community
- 6.6 Foster volunteerism and engagement

MAJOR THEMES: Additional Themes

Each of the following topics were mentioned across all three questionnaires over 100 times and are listed in order of frequency. Many of these themes integrate with the above themes.

Discouraging Tree Removal – Penalties - Tree Preservation

There is a strong desire to keep existing trees where they are. These thoughts were shared alongside the need to preserve mature trees because of their superior benefit to newly planted ones. This also intersects with a desire to enforce penalties on developers and homeowners (especially those on single-family lots) who remove trees as a result of projects on their property.

Invasive Removal - Native Plantings

A major management component related to maintenance was related to the impacts of invasive plants on trees and natural resources. Community members appreciate invasive removal programs, encourage more volunteer opportunities and education around this practice, and are in favor of native plantings preferred policies.

Private Property - Single Family Housing

Community members believe that private property and single-family homeowners should inevitably play a major role in the conservation and expansion of Arlington's forestry and natural resources. Suggestions were related to how the County can work with these parties to educate them about opportunities and penalize them when necessary.

Forests - Natural Areas

Many comments were about how Arlington's forests and wooded areas such as the natural resource conservation areas make them very happy. They also mention other natural areas such as streams, natural surface trails and green space overall as desired attractions.

Accessibility – Connectivity

While some of these comments were about how people found it easy to access a park or natural area from their home, others expressed a desire for more connectivity between natural areas and an expansion of the County's trail system.

Green Space - Open Space

People appreciate the County's rich offerings of green space for humans and wildlife. They would like to see this expanded and mention having more parks, meadows, woodlands. They were also in opposition to more developed areas with impervious surfaces. While many comments mentioned "open space", this is not to be confused with mowed lawns. People expressed that they would rather have spaces with vegetation than flat lawns.

Stormwater Management

Community members would like to see more stormwater runoff controls that keep water on site and help mitigate flooding. Suggestions include more bio-retention measures, rain gardens, more trees and vegetation, and practices to combat climate change.

Planning Practices - Smart Growth

Comments expressed a need to plan for the protection and expansion of green space. If there is a need to accommodate increased population density, build up, not out. There is also an urge to consider prioritizing underground utility instead of overhead in order to reduce negative impacts on tree growth.

Recreation

Participants voiced their interests in various types of active and passive recreation. While some emphasized natural areas as places to find peace and respite whether by sitting and enjoying being outdoors, others expressed how green spaces play a significant role in staying active. People play sports in parks, walk and hike along natural surface trails, and sometimes use these spaces for exercise. Biking on natural surface trails specifically stood out as many participants advocated for the building of sustainable trails that can accommodate the activity. Some community members shared that biking on natural trails can damage natural resources and should be reserved for paved trails.

Public Easements and Infrastructure

Many participants voiced the need for more natural land. This included calls for more land acquisition for public easements an expansion of Arlington's natural corridors. These comments also intersected with topics such as better transportation infrastructure in order to provide better access to nature, fewer parking lots and infill development, fewer overhead utilities and more parks.

Impervious Surfaces

A large number of participants voiced concerns about the need to reduce the amount of impervious surfaces across the County. Comments reflected feelings that there has been a noticeable increase in development and excessive paving over infill lots. Community members want the County to manage the use of hardscape surfaces better so that green space can be prioritized.

Land Acquisition - Vacant Land

Community members often suggested investing in more land and using it as green space. Vacant land, land that is viable for restoration projects, and potential opportunities for land sharing or property donations were also mentioned.

Climate Change – Sustainability

A lot of comments concerned the impacts of climate change on Arlington's natural

lands and ideas for mitigating the impacts. Among them were more education on sustainable practices, improving water quality and encouraging management practices that can protect trees and natural resources from the impacts of rising temperatures.

Biophilic Design - Nature in an Urban Environment

Comments stressed the need to effectively integrate trees and natural resources into the built environment. Community members suggest that incorporating biophilic principles such as green buildings, green roofs and pocket parks can help expand Arlington's natural resources. Comments also suggest incentivizing or even requiring developers to incorporate these principles into their projects.

OPEN ENDED COMMUNITY COMMENTS

APPENDIX A: [Nature in Arlington Questionnaire Community Comments](#)

- [Name one thing about Arlington’s natural resources and forestry that makes you most happy.](#)
- [If you could snap your fingers, what would be your one wish to improve nature in Arlington?](#)
- [What other important topics do you think need to be added to the list of focus areas?](#)
- [What do you think is the biggest threat to the future of Arlington’s natural resources and tree canopy?](#)
- [What would you hope Arlington’s natural resources and tree canopy look like in 30 years?](#)

APPENDIX B: [Natural Areas Questionnaire Community Comments](#)

- [What do you think are the best ways to CONSERVE Arlington’s natural resources?](#)
- [What do you think are the best ways to EXPAND Arlington’s natural resources?](#)

APPENDIX C: [Tree Canopy Questionnaire Community Comments](#)

- [What areas of opportunity are there to CONSERVE Arlington’s tree canopy?](#)
- [What areas of opportunity are there to EXPAND Arlington’s tree canopy?](#)