

**2020 Five-Year Review of Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan**  
**July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2022**  
**Technical Report**

Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important.

***Arlington County Vision***

## I. Introduction

The Code of Virginia requires all governing bodies in the Commonwealth to have an adopted Comprehensive Plan and for the local planning commission to review the plan at least once every five years. The statute, however, does not set specific standards to determine what constitutes a review of the Comprehensive Plan or how such a review should be conducted. In Arlington, the documents that comprise the Comprehensive Plan are reviewed and amended on a continuing basis, as needed. However, approximately every five years, the Planning Commission receives an update summarizing the reviews and amendments to the Comprehensive Plan which have taken place during the allotted timeframe.

In Arlington, the Comprehensive Plan was established to guide, through policy, the development of Arlington County as a safe, healthy and attractive place to live, work and play. Since its original adoption, Arlington's Comprehensive Plan has been continually updated and expanded and now comprises eleven elements including the General Land Use Plan, the Master Transportation Plan, the Storm Water Master Plan, the Water Distribution System Master Plan, the Sanitary Sewer Collection System Master Plan, the Recycling Program Implementation Plan and Map, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and Plan, the Public Spaces Master Plan, the Historic Preservation Master Plan, the Community Energy Plan and the Affordable Housing Master Plan.

To comply with the Code of Virginia requirements regarding cyclical reviews of the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Division of the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development has updated the *Essential Guide to the Comprehensive Plan* and has summarized these changes in this technical report, along with a summary of amendments related to the Comprehensive Plan elements since July 1, 2016 and additional updates already planned to occur within the next review cycle. The Planning Commission will make a determination on this review and the completed documentation and the final materials will be posted on the [Comprehensive Plan webpage](#). This will constitute the 2020 Five-Year Review.

In summary, staff concludes that the Comprehensive Plan continues to address the goals and planning policies adopted by the County Board. However, in the future, updates to certain elements of the Comprehensive Plan may be needed.

## **II. The Comprehensive Plan as of June 30, 2022**

### **Background**

The Code of Virginia requires all governing bodies in the Commonwealth to have an adopted Comprehensive Plan. Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan was established by resolution of the County Board on August 27, 1960. This resolution called for the preparation of Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan, which originally included five elements: the General Land Use Plan, the Water Distribution System Master Plan, the Sanitary Sewer Collection System Master Plan, the Storm Sewer Plan and the Major Thoroughfare and Collector Streets Plan. In later years, additional elements were added to the Comprehensive Plan and some were replaced by new plans. For example, the Major Thoroughfare and Collector Streets Plan was replaced in 1986 by the Master Transportation Plan. Elements added to the Comprehensive Plan and their initial adoption dates include the Recycling Program Implementation Plan and Map in 1990, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and Plan in 1992, the Open Space Master Plan in 1984, now the Public Spaces Master Plan as of 1994, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and Plan in 2001, the Historic Preservation Master Plan in 2006, the Community Energy Plan in 2013 and the Affordable Housing Master Plan in 2015.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The Comprehensive Plan was established in order that Arlington County may remain a safe, healthy, convenient and prosperous community and an attractive place in which to live, work and play, with stable or expanding values and potentialities for growth and continued economic health. The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide the coordinated and harmonious development of Arlington County through the provision of high standards of public services and facilities based on the following general principles<sup>1</sup>:

- Retention of the predominantly residential character of the County, and limitation of intense development to limited and defined areas;
- Promotion of sound business, commercial and light industrial activities in designated areas appropriately related to residential neighborhoods;
- Development of governmental facilities which will promote efficiency of operation and optimum public safety and service, including the areas of health, welfare, culture and recreation;
- Provision of an adequate supply of water effectively distributed;

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<sup>1</sup> These principles were included in the County Board Resolution applying to the Comprehensive Plan adopted by the County Board in 1960.

- Maintenance of sewage disposal standards acceptable to the immediate County area and its neighbors in the entire Washington Metropolitan Area and consistent with the program of pollution abatement of the Potomac River;
- Provision of an adequate storm water drainage system; and
- Provision of an adequate system of traffic routes which is designed to form an integral part of the highway and transportation system of the County and region, assuring a safe, convenient flow of traffic, thereby facilitating economic and social interchange in the County.

In addition, the County Board has endorsed a land use policy which has evolved from an extensive citizen participation process and is designed to ensure that Arlington is a balanced community which provides residential, recreational, educational, health, shopping and employment opportunities with good transportation supported by a strong tax base and the effective use of public funds. An overarching theme of many of Arlington's initiatives, from land use to transportation to stormwater management, is that of sustainability and transit-oriented development, which further demonstrates alignment with Commonwealth enabling legislation for incentive-based zoning that is applied in Arlington to promote new urbanism and traditional neighborhood development and sustainability, among other principles. In support of Arlington's overall policy goals, the following adopted land use goals and objectives have been incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan<sup>2</sup>:

- Concentrate high density residential, commercial and office development within designated Metro Station Areas in the Rosslyn-Ballston and Richmond Highway Metrorail transit corridors. This policy encourages the use of public transit and reduces the use of motor vehicles.
- Promote mixed-use development in Metro Station Areas to provide a balance of residential, shopping and employment opportunities. The intent of this policy is to achieve continuous use and activity in these areas.
- Increase the supply of housing by encouraging construction of a variety of housing types and prices at a range of heights and densities in and near Metro Station Areas. The Plan allows a significant number of townhouses, mid-rise and high-rise dwelling units within designated Metro Station Areas.
- Preserve and enhance existing single-family and apartment neighborhoods. Within Metro Station Areas, land use densities are concentrated near the Metro Station, tapering down to surrounding residential areas to limit the impacts of high-density development. Throughout the County, the Neighborhood Conservation Program [now the Arlington Neighborhoods Program] and other community improvement programs help preserve and

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<sup>2</sup> These goals and objectives were incorporated into the General Land Use Plan (an element of the Comprehensive Plan) which is the primary policy guide for the development of Arlington County.

enhance older residential areas and help provide housing at a range of price levels and densities.

- Preserve and enhance neighborhood retail areas. The County encourages the preservation and revitalization of neighborhood retail areas that serve everyday shopping and service needs and are consistent with adopted County plans. The Commercial Revitalization Program concentrates public capital improvements and County services in these areas to stimulate private reinvestment.

Other goals and objectives have been incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan through the years, including the provision of an adequate supply of beneficial open space which is safe, accessible and enjoyable, as outlined in the Public Spaces Master Plan, energy goals as described in the Community Energy Plan, and targets for affordable housing, as set forth in the General Land Use Plan.

### **Elements of the Comprehensive Plan**

As of June 30, 2022, Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan is comprised of the following eleven elements, and respective sub-elements as noted:

- General Land Use Plan
- Master Transportation Plan
  - Goals & Policies Element
  - Map Element
  - Bicycle Element
  - Pedestrian Element
  - Transportation Demand & System Management Element
  - Transit Element
  - Parking & Curbspace Management Element
  - Streets Element
- Storm Water Master Plan
- Water Distribution System Master Plan
- Sanitary Sewer Collection System Master Plan
- Recycling Program Implementation Plan and Map
- Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan
- Public Spaces Master Plan
  - Urban Forest Master Plan
  - Natural Resources Management Plan
  - Public Art Master Plan
- Historic Preservation Master Plan
- Community Energy Plan
- Affordable Housing Master Plan

Although the Planning Division in the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development is responsible for the overall coordination and review of the Comprehensive Plan, several agencies within Arlington County are responsible for the review of the specific elements that make up the Comprehensive Plan. A description of each element and the name of the agency responsible for that element is provided in the companion document, the 2023 Essential Guide to Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan. This information and the most recent version of each element are also available on the [County's Comprehensive Plan](#) webpage.

### III. Amendments

During the past six years, the following elements and sub-elements were adopted or updated. All of these elements continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis and have been amended in response to new adopted policy, development requests, and as part of long-range planning processes.

- Community Energy Plan – Updated 2019
- General Land Use Plan – Reprinted 2020, with biannual updates through December 2021
- Master Transportation Plan (comprised of eight sub-elements):
  - Bicycle - Adopted 2019
  - Transit – Updated 2016
  - Streets - Amended 2016
- Public Spaces Master Plan – Adopted 2019 (including three sub-elements):
  - Urban Forest Master Plan
  - Public Art Master Plan – Updated 2021
  - Natural Resource Management Plan

The following elements and sub-elements are planned for adoption or updates within the next review cycle.

- Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan
- Forestry and Natural Resources Master Plan
- Sanitary Sewer Master Plan
- Historic Preservation Master Plan
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- General Land Use Plan (changes related to the Missing Middle Housing Study and the Forestry and Natural Resources Master Plan)

#### **IV. Awards**

The County has received recognition and numerous awards for its work across multiple disciplines related to its Comprehensive Plan Elements over the past six years. Highlights include the following:

[County Awards](#)

#### **V. Updates to Associated Documents**

The [Essential Guide to Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan](#) and the [Quick Reference Guide to Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan](#) were prepared in 2017 to provide an easy-to-understand overview of the Comprehensive Plan. Capturing the updates to the Comprehensive Plan elements made during the past six years and anticipated future updates via revisions to the Essential Guide is a more accessible and efficient way to reflect these updates than creating a separate report, as has been done in the past. The updates to the Comprehensive Plan over the past six years were mostly editorial or technical changes and include the following:

- Updated demographic information
- Acknowledged Arlington County's ranking on the Trust for Public Land's National 2022 ParkScore report
- Revised description of the Community Energy Plan
- Updated adoption and/or publication dates for Comprehensive Plan elements and sub-elements
- Anticipated future Comprehensive Plan updates.

#### **VI. Upcoming Comprehensive Plan Review**

Following acceptance of the 2020 Five-Year Review, a related process is needed and will begin in 2023. Consistent with the efforts of other jurisdictions updating their comprehensive plans to address and communicate new priorities, this process will evaluate how Arlington's Comprehensive Plan articulates the County's strategies to steward and implement the County's vision. This upcoming process will consider whether amendments to the Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives, unchanged since original adoption in 1960, are needed to better communicate how Arlington manages growth and change relative to 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and priorities. This effort will also consider new goals and policies needed to incorporate elements adopted since 1960, as well as new and emerging priorities not currently addressed in any of

the County's Comprehensive Plan elements, such as racial equity, public health, and economic resilience. These amendments may lead to identifying key future work plan priorities for the County.

Staff will engage the Planning Commission in this upcoming process and will include additional community and commission engagement to identify priority areas for future Comprehensive Plan and supporting document updates and amendments.

## VII. Excerpts from the [Code of Virginia](#)

The following excerpts are included to provide context for this Comprehensive Plan review.

### **§ 15.2-2223. Comprehensive plan to be prepared and adopted; scope and purpose.**

A. The local planning commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing body shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.

In the preparation of a comprehensive plan, the commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and trends of growth, and of the probable future requirements of its territory and inhabitants. The comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.

The comprehensive plan shall be general in nature, in that it shall designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of each feature, including any road improvement and any transportation improvement, shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use as the case may be.

B. 1. As part of the comprehensive plan, each locality shall develop a transportation plan that designates a system of transportation infrastructure needs and recommendations that include the designation of new and expanded transportation facilities and that support the planned development of the territory covered by the plan and shall include, as appropriate, but not be limited to, roadways, bicycle accommodations, pedestrian accommodations, railways, bridges, waterways, airports, ports, and public transportation facilities. The plan shall recognize and differentiate among a hierarchy of roads such as expressways, arterials, and collectors. In developing the plan, the locality shall take into consideration how to align transportation infrastructure and facilities with affordable, accessible housing and community services that are located within the territory in order to facilitate community integration of the elderly and

persons with disabilities. The Virginia Department of Transportation shall, upon request, provide localities with technical assistance in preparing such transportation plan.

2. The transportation plan shall include a map that shall show road and transportation improvements, including the cost estimates of such road and transportation improvements from the Virginia Department of Transportation, taking into account the current and future needs of residents in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated.

3. The transportation plan, and any amendment thereto pursuant to § 15.2-2229, shall be consistent with the Commonwealth Transportation Board's Statewide Transportation Plan developed pursuant to § 33.2-353, the Six-Year Improvement Program adopted pursuant to subsection B of § 33.2-214, and the location of routes to be followed by roads comprising systems of state highways pursuant to subsection A of § 33.2-208. The locality shall consult with the Virginia Department of Transportation to assure such consistency is achieved. The transportation plan need reflect only those changes in the annual update of the Six-Year Improvement Program that are deemed to be significant new, expanded, or relocated roadways.

4. Prior to the adoption of the transportation plan or any amendment to the transportation plan, the locality shall submit such plan or amendment to the Department for review and comment. The Department shall conduct its review and provide written comments to the locality on the consistency of the transportation plan or any amendment to the provisions of subdivision 1. The Department shall provide such written comments to the locality within 90 days of receipt of the plan or amendment, or such other shorter period of time as may be otherwise agreed upon by the Department and the locality.

5. The locality shall submit a copy of the adopted transportation plan or any amendment to the transportation plan to the Department for informational purposes. If the Department determines that the transportation plan or amendment is not consistent with the provisions of subdivision 1, the Department shall notify the Commonwealth Transportation Board so that the Board may take appropriate action in accordance with subsection F of § 33.2-214.

6. If the adopted transportation plan designates corridors planned to be served by mass transit, as defined in § 33.2-100, a portion of its allocation from (i) the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority distribution specified in subdivision B 1 of § 33.2-2510, (ii) the commercial and industrial real property tax revenue specified in § 58.1-3221.3, and (iii) the secondary system road construction program, as described in Article 5 (§ 33.2-351 et seq.) of Chapter 3 of Title 33.2, may be used for the purpose of utility undergrounding in the planned corridor, if the locality matches 100 percent of the state allocation.

7. Each locality's amendments or updates to its transportation plan as required by subdivisions 2 through 5 shall be made on or before its ongoing scheduled date for updating its transportation plan.

C. The comprehensive plan, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter, shall show the locality's long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory covered by the plan. It may include, but need not be limited to:

1. The designation of areas for various types of public and private development and use, such as different kinds of residential, including age-restricted, housing; business; industrial; agricultural; mineral resources; conservation; active and passive recreation; public service; flood plain and drainage; and other areas;
2. The designation of a system of community service facilities such as parks, sports playing fields, forests, schools, playgrounds, public buildings and institutions, hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, community centers, waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas, and the like;
3. The designation of historical areas and areas for urban renewal or other treatment;
4. The designation of areas for the implementation of reasonable measures to provide for the continued availability, quality, and sustainability of groundwater and surface water;
5. A capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, mineral resource district maps and agricultural and forestal district maps, where applicable;
6. The location of existing or proposed recycling centers;
7. The location of military bases, military installations, and military airports and their adjacent safety areas; and
8. The designation of corridors or routes for electric transmission lines of 150 kilovolts or more.

D. The comprehensive plan shall include the designation of areas and implementation of measures for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing, which is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all levels of income in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated.

E. The comprehensive plan shall consider strategies to provide broadband infrastructure that is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents and businesses in the locality. To this end, local planning commissions may consult with and receive technical assistance from the Center for Innovative Technology, among other resources.

1975, c. 641, § 15.1-446.1; 1976, c. 650; 1977, c. 228; 1988, c. 268; 1989, c. 532; 1990, c. 19; 1993, cc. 116, 758; 1996, cc. 585, 600; 1997, c. 587; 2003, c. 811; 2004, cc. 691, 799; 2005, cc. 466, 699; 2006, cc. 527, 563, 564; 2007, c. 761; 2012, cc. 729, 733; 2013, cc. 561, 585, 646, 656; 2014, cc. 397, 443; 2018, cc. 420, 691, 796, 828.

**§ 15.2-2230. Plan to be reviewed at least once every five years.**

At least once every five years the comprehensive plan shall be reviewed by the local planning commission to determine whether it is advisable to amend the plan.

Code 1950, § 15-964.8; 1962, c. 407, § 15.1-454; 1975, c. 641; 1997, c. 587.

**VIII. Amendments to the General Land Use Plan**

**VIX. Amendments to the Master Transportation Plan**

**VX. Essential Guide to Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan**