



PLANNING FOR ARLINGTON COUNTY'S LIBRARY SYSTEM

With the FY 2024 proposed budget, we continue our commitment to Arlington Public Library, a highly valued and trusted resource in the community. The pandemic and subsequent labor market issues hit library services particularly hard due to structural staffing issues (an over reliance on temporary employees). Now that we are “back to normal”, the County Manager is recommending a review of future facility and materials funding for the system. How will the library continue to provide a high level of service and access for our most vulnerable residents over the next decade in a changing environment?

Over the last several years, the library has continued to prioritize high quality public service and leveling the playing field of opportunity for all residents. A few initiatives include:

- In FY 2023, the County Board approved 8.5 new permanent FTEs as a first step towards moving away from the Library’s over-reliance on temporary staff. This reliance is both unfair to regularly scheduled temporary staff, who do not earn benefits, and can make it challenging to provide consistent, predictable, and high-quality service to library patrons.
- In keeping with national and local trends, the County Board eliminated library overdue fines on July 1, 2020, which data showed the disproportionately negative impact on Black and Hispanic residents use of the library system.

Over the next several years, two new facilities will come online: Crystal City and Columbia Pike. However, the FY 2024 proposed budget is funding some public service costs with one-time funds (\$406,453). Library collections (print books, e-books, online resources, and other specialized collections) have been partially funded through one-time funds for many years. The one-time funding of \$680,000 (out of a total collections budget of \$2,242,742) in FY 2024, continues a trend of meeting the growing cost of collections and long hold times for popular titles with one-time funds.

In the second half of 2023, the County Manager’s Office and Arlington Public Library leadership will engage with the community in longer-term strategic discussions about these issues and how to best provide library services in a changed and changing environment.

Arlington’s population has grown from 135,449 in 1950 to an estimated 235,500 in 2022. The arrival of Metrorail in 1977 changed the landscape of Arlington and spurred development of two of the three main current planning corridors in the County – the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor and the Richmond Highway Corridor. Together with the Columbia Pike Corridor, 84 percent of Arlington’s population growth is

forecasted to occur in these three planning corridors between 2020 and 2045.

Since 1950, the general siting of Arlington public library locations has remained largely unchanged. In 1950, the library locations in Arlington were Aurora Hills, Cherrydale, Clarendon (now Central), Columbia Pike, Glencarlyn, Fairlington (now Shirlington), and Westover. Some of the most significant changes to Arlington Public Library over this time period include:

- Central library opened on the current site in 1961. Additions were made to Central Library in 1967-1968 and 1990-1994.
- After moving several times, Columbia Pike settled into its current location in 1975.
- In January 1989, a Government Reference Library opened in the County government building at 2100 Clarendon Boulevard (now Bozman). This location moved to a new public-oriented site in the building's lobby in 2007 and began to house a small browsing collection. The location was not open nights or weekends.
- Shirlington moved less than a half mile way and into a new building in 2006.
- Westover moved down the street to a new building in 2009.

After nearly 15 years, Arlington Public Library is about to embark on a time of growth, which brings the opportunity to reach new and more Arlington residents with library services. A newly renovated Courthouse location will open in March 2023. The expanded location will offer children's services for the first time and offer similar hours to other neighborhood-based locations, including evening and Saturday hours. As part of a residential redevelopment project, JBG Smith is financially supporting a new 7,200 square foot library location at 1901 S. Bell Street. This will be a full-service library location and is scheduled to open in 2025. With Arlington Public Schools' planned expansion of the Arlington Career Center building, which has housed the Columbia Pike library since 1975, the County purchased just under an acre at 3108 Columbia Pike in 2022. The location is identified as a potential site for a future Columbia Pike library and for co-location of County Board priorities, such as affordable housing. The site currently has a surface parking lot.

The public library plays a pivotal role in leveling the playing field of opportunity and providing free access to all community members regardless of income or status. Using data and an equity lens framework, the strategic discussion will look at how current and future library services and locations can best meet the needs of all Arlington residents, today and in the future. Topics to be discussed will likely include how to prioritize competing needs of new locations, established locations, a sustainable budget for library collections, and a staffing model that provides the highest level of reliability and service for residents.

We hope to include preliminary recommendations in the FY 2025 budget.