



INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY COMMISSION

Courthouse Plaza, Suite 610 2100 Clarendon Blvd Arlington, VA 22201

TEL 703-228-3220 FAX 703-228-3304 TTY 703.228.4611 www.arlingtonva.us

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Commission Members

John Burke, Chair
Michael Cornfield, Vice Chair
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Jacqueline Snelling
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Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Libby Garvey,
Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chairwoman Garvey,

On behalf of the Information Technology Advisory (Tech) Commission, I am writing to you to express our recommendations related to information technology policy including the provision of broadband infrastructure. We are pleased that the recently completed [broadband study](#) endorsed our recommendation to create a strategic plan. We reiterate our recommendation to update the Comprehensive Plan to address broadband as required by Virginia Code section 15.2-2223 paragraph E.

We endorse the report's recommendations to address digital equity, especially the concept of "Digital Navigators." The scope of the recommendations, however, is ultimately too narrow. We believe the Comprehensive Plan Element should include goals for cost of access, network resilience, and economic development in addition to Digital Equity. We also recommend the Board adopt policy goals that address a wider range of issues. Our preference is to include these goals in the Comprehensive Plan update, however the specific vehicle the Board uses is less critical. We have included two appendices with this letter for your reference and consideration.

1. Recommended Comprehensive Plan Element policy goals
2. Implications of the Broadband Study for the future of Connect Arlington

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Burke".

John Burke,

Chair
Information Technology Advisory Commission
Arlington, VA 22201

Appendix 1 Recommended Policy Goals

The following are a series of policy goals the Information Technology Advisory (Tech) Commission recommends be considered for inclusion in an update to the Arlington County Comprehensive plan “...to provide broadband infrastructure that is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents and businesses...”¹

- Goal 1 – Ensure universal access to high quality, affordable broadband internet.
- Goal 2 – Ensure resilient wired and wireless networks
- Goal 3 – Promote digital equity and eliminate the digital divide
- Goal 4 – Support healthy economic activity across public, private, and non-profit sectors
- Goal 5 – Maximize the value of the Connect Arlington infrastructure

While the updated requirements for the Comprehensive Plan only specify “broadband infrastructure,” the commission reiterates our prior recommendation to address a broader set of policy issues raised by modern information technology. Our preference is that they are included in the Comprehensive Plan update, but they may also be addressed as discrete policy actions.

- Goal 1 – Ensure effective information technology governance across the entire County enterprise
- Goal 2 – Ensure effective information technology service management across the entire County enterprise
- Goal 3 – Support privacy as a fundamental civil right
- Goal 4 – Embed community values of transparency, privacy, and civic engagement in digital service design and delivery.
- Goal 5 – Manage data as a strategic asset and retain public ownership of their value stream
- Goal 6 – Prioritize and evaluate “smart cities” systems as infrastructure and municipal services
- Goal 7 – Use technology to facilitate open data, open government, and civic engagement
- Goal 8 – Promote digital literacy in the community

¹ <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title15.2/chapter22/section15.2-2223/>

Appendix 2 Implications of Broadband Study for the future of Connect Arlington

The [Broadband Study](#) confirmed that Arlington is a well-served market with multiple competing commercial providers. It failed, however, to address a central policy question that was an impetus for the study: How can we maximize the value of Connect Arlington? Previously the [Broadband Advisory Commission](#) had made several recommendations, and a community advocacy group [ArlFiber](#) has advocated for using Connect Arlington as the basis for a municipal broadband provider. While the most recent Broadband study did not focus on this question, the competitive market conditions documented in the study leave the commission skeptical that a municipal broadband provider would be able to compete with existing commercial providers and achieve the cost and service improvements [ArlFiber](#) envisions. This does not mean, however, that the County should walk away from leveraging the Connect Arlington infrastructure, and the Commission advises further detailed study into what models may be successful and advancing the policy goals recommended above. Indeed, maximizing the value of the Connect Arlington infrastructure is recommended as an explicit policy goal. The following questions warrant further study:

1. **Could Connect Arlington serve as the foundation for a niche municipal broadband provider?** The ability to compete with commercial providers is likely dependent on the physical proximity of Connect Arlington infrastructure to potential customers. The broadband study did not include the physical location of network infrastructure in its data gathering. It is plausible that a municipal broadband provider with Connect Arlington as its backbone and the county government and schools as anchor tenants could win a small share of commercial customers. Over time a non-profit municipal broadband provider could help close the digital divide and reduce the growth in price for access.
2. **Could the [JBG – dark fiber lease](#) model simplify network access in other commercial corridors or County wide?** The agreement “...support[s] and benefit[s] businesses, federal agencies, educational institutions, the public and other organizations with cost-competitive and reliable access to high-speed wired or wireless (5G) data-transmission capacity to promote economic and community development.” If successful, these benefits should not be limited to “innovation districts” but spread equally county wide.
3. **How can the County partner with NGOs to leverage Connect Arlington infrastructure in support of broader policy goals?** Projects like the [Barcroft Apartments](#) and service providers like the [Arlington Free Clinic](#) could benefit from reduced cost network access. What barriers exist to scaling up projects like the [broadband at Arlington Mill Residences](#)?

These are just some of the outstanding questions. The County should move aggressively to advance its policy agenda using the under-utilized dark fiber available on Connect Arlington.