

11.13.25

LRPC Hybrid Meeting

Comprehensive Plan Update

Public Comments Received Prior to Meeting

1. **Comment #1** – I support higher density zoning and housing for all. I’m sure the experts on the Long Range Planning Committee have read Conor Dougherty’s book Golden Gates, but I’d recommend it to those against higher density housing. It will help you understand why regulatory hurdles will make our community inaccessible to all but the ultra-wealthy. I don’t want our county to have a housing market like those in Silicon Valley and the Bay Area.
2. **Comment #2** – First, the New Comp Plan should retain much if not all of the language of the original including, “Retention of the predominantly residential character of the county, and limitation of intense development to limited and defined areas.”

We don’t want to encourage densification for densification’s sake at the expense of neighborhoods and loss of trees while only enriching a small number of developers whose business model is tear-downs in Arlington to build expensive new housing.

Staff argues we need new language to accomplish things. But nothing in the current language has kept Arlington from becoming a great place to live. However, more focus on the environment would be in keeping with the times. One modification should be to add the word environment to the list of key goals in this existing bullet: “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.”

Second, The approach of using the APA six guidelines is questionable. They are feel-good words most people would probably agree with but are poorly defined and could be interpreted in multiple ways. E.g., 6% of the FY 2026 County Budget, some \$100 million dollars is for housing support programs. More percentages that could be considered equity go for transport or food assistance. These are good programs and deserve support. But does “interwoven equity” mean everybody’s taxes or rents will increase to pay more for these or new programs? If new ones, which ones?

Third, local government should be operationally focused on maintaining public services and safety – that is a principle that should be the foundation of its efforts. Feel-good wording may be appealing to staff but not to the resident who will wonder if their tax dollars and staff time are focused on having our first responders and police well-staffed, having top notch schools, maintaining a clean water supply, ensuring our transportation

systems and roads are in good repair and safe, ensuring our parks and community centers are thriving and in good shape and storm water runoff and sewage is being addressed. Or will our tax dollars and staff dime be frivoloed away pursuing some ill-defined well-meaning goals.

Finally, there has not been enough public outreach. Some 240,000 people live in Arlington and will be affected by the Comp Plan. I attended the GMU event. It was a big deal with a big turn out by the County. Board members and Staff, however, appeared to out number the attendees. Only 38 people showed up though the room could have held many more. Staff slides indicate seemingly only a very small part of Arlington was reached. There needs to be more direct reach out to neighborhoods across Arlington.

- 3. Comment #3** – As a former chair of the Arlington Planning Commission who served over 10 years on it, I appreciate the need to periodically review the comp plan.

But, as I see it, the County is using this review to make another run at strengthening the underpinnings of Missing Middle Housing (MMH/EHO). That will result in *random, by-right, densification* to the detriment of a transit-oriented development policy that made sense for 50 years and it still makes sense now. That meant: (1) focusing development near the Metro stations and, by extension, Metro corridors and (2) protecting the neighborhoods. Arlington needs to continue pursuing the smart growth for which it has been recognized and retain areas with different density choices, mixed uses, green space, neighborhood retail and pedestrian/cyclist-friendly design.

I ask that you now limit high density to 4 transit corridors – supporting the 2 existing Metro corridors, plus Columbia Pike and Langston Boulevard, while retaining the lower-density character of the remaining parts of the County. After all, Arlington is already dense.

As Arlington approaches build-out, it needs to focus on livability rather than trying to overstuff neighborhoods. As tempting as it may be to use abandoned or soon to be abandoned churches as dense housing sites, it is important to explore alternative uses for these buildings or their sites.

The County is moving ahead with EHO even as this policy is being litigated with the obvious uncertainties that may result. The main problems with EHO are that it does not require: (1) affordable housing or (2) planning of infrastructure and services ahead of development in affected areas paid by developers. It has already caused relatively affordable homes to be replaced by far more expensive units.

The County needs to adopt the goal of *no net loss* of affordable housing units and bedrooms and publicly track actions affecting that goal. It can achieve this through office or hotel conversions to housing, preservation grants and low-interest loans, low or no-cost ground leases, low interest loans for closing costs and lastly tax credits – all with a preference for enabling teachers, first responders and first-time homebuyers to live in the County.

Major incoming businesses need to contribute to a housing fund to build or preserve housing for middle- and low-income residents. The County could also assist by assembling housing sites near Metro stations or using existing County-owned property, which might be enabled by land exchanges. Increased density needs to be accompanied by on-site parking or through committed shared business parking.

Operating on a corridor and/or neighborhood basis, the County needs to exclude from added density: (1) resource protection areas, (2) steep slopes and (3) areas challenged by stormwater management, plus (4) narrow, winding roads where existing parking already limits access for emergency and refuse vehicles. Preservation or replacement of tree canopy needs to be a priority along with linking green spaces.

Public Comments Received After Meeting

- 1. Comment #1** – A thriving community is one where livability and growth work hand in hand. The integration of increased density within Arlington should not be seen as a threat, but rather as an opportunity—when thoughtfully planned, density can be highly desirable. It is important to recognize the distinction between mere crowding and true community: density that lacks accompanying amenities results in crowding, whereas density supported by well-planned amenities fosters a sense of community.

Livability, Growth, and the Role of Density

A thriving community is one where livability and growth work hand in hand. The integration of increased density within Arlington should not be seen as a threat, but rather as an opportunity—when thoughtfully planned, density can be highly desirable. It is important to recognize the distinction between mere crowding and true community: density that lacks accompanying amenities results in crowding, whereas density supported by well-planned amenities fosters a sense of community.

Central to achieving livable density is walkability. When density is designed with walkability in mind and strategically situated, it becomes a powerful catalyst for enhancing economic vitality, advancing environmental sustainability, and creating spaces that invite people to gather, connect, and celebrate shared community values.

As Arlington looks to the future, it is essential to begin by asking the right questions. Rather than focusing solely on “how dense?” we should consider “what kind of place are we building?” This shift in perspective encourages the creation of communities that are walkable, diverse, resilient, and fiscally responsible. Ultimately, density done right transcends simple numbers—it is about the thoughtful art of shaping enduring places that hold meaning for generations to come.

Balancing Preservation and Progress

Decisions made in the past continue to shape Arlington’s present reality. Many residents feel a strong attachment to the current state of the community and are concerned that changes may diminish their quality of life or alter the established “character” of Arlington. This perspective often leads to efforts aimed at preserving the status quo, driven by a sense of loss-aversion - protecting what is already familiar rather than exploring opportunities for growth and improvement.

Such an outlook can become deeply rooted, making it challenging for some members of the community to envision alternatives or embrace innovative possibilities for progress. When the focus remains solely on safeguarding existing assets, it can limit Arlington’s collective capacity to imagine and achieve a future that is more inclusive and abundant for all.

Need for Flexibility in Planning

Arlington’s ability to respond effectively to future challenges depends on maintaining flexibility within its comprehensive plan. If plan elements are excessively prescriptive or restrictive, the community may struggle to adapt to evolving environmental or economic circumstances. Ensuring that the comprehensive plan allows for adaptability is essential for Arlington to meet unforeseen needs and remain resilient in the face of change.

Navigating Conflicts Within the Comprehensive Plan

Arlington will inevitably face conflicts between Comprehensive Plan goals, as stakeholders push for their own priorities. These disagreements can cause costly delays and added risks for sponsors. The current process for resolving such issues is unclear, creating uncertainty in the community. The Comprehensive Plan should directly address goal conflicts and outline how tradeoffs will be evaluated and resolved.