
Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) of the Planning Commission
Meeting Summary
May 13, 2026
7:00 p.m.

This meeting was a hybrid virtual/in-person public meeting held through electronic communication means.

Planning Commissioners in attendance:

- Sara Steinberger, LRPC Chair (in-person)
- Adriana Torres-Sejas (absent)
- Eric Berkey (absent)
- Jim Lantelme (in-person)
- Karen Guevara (absent)
- Nia Bagley (in-person)
- Paola Amodeo (in-person)
- Peter Robertson (virtual)
- Tony Striner (absent)
- Tenley Peterson (in-person)
- Devanshi Patel, (absent)

Other Commission/Advisory Board Members in attendance:

- Arlington Commission for the Arts and Public Art Committee, Alyssa Tope (virtual)
- Arlington Neighborhoods Advisory Committee, Cliff McCreedy (virtual)
- Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission, Rob Sandoli (virtual)
- Commission on Aging, William Way (virtual)
- Disability Advisory Commission, Karen Audant (virtual)
- Economic Development Commission, Brad Mason (in-person)
- Forestry and Natural Resources Commission, Bob Benson (in-person)
- Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board, Alex Foster (in-person)
- Information Technology Advisory Commission, John Burke (in-person)
- Public Facility Review Committee, Nia Bagley (in-person)

Staff in attendance (CPHD Comprehensive Planning):

- Natasha Alfonso-Ahmed, LRPC Coordinator and Principal Planner (in-person)
- Rana Abu Ghazaleh, Project Lead, Principal Planner (in-person)
- Jennifer Smith, Comprehensive Planning Manager (in-person)
- Matthew Ladd, Section Supervisor, (in-person)
- Nory Flores, Associate Planner (in-person)

Comprehensive Plan Update - Progress Update and Review of Draft Guiding Principles

Commissioner Peterson opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioner Steinberger recognized staff members and members of other Arlington County Commissions and Advisory Boards in attendance.

A staff presentation was provided by Rana Abu Ghazaleh on the County's Draft Guiding Principles and Supporting Statements for the Comprehensive Plan, as well as a summary of the feedback in the focus groups, community meetings, pop-ups and online feedback form from the public engagement events conducted during 2025.

It was noted that the purpose of this third LRPC meeting is to hear from the Commissioners if the proposed Guiding Principles reflect the County's vision, values and priorities; are clear and appropriately scoped for long-term policy; and/or are missing/underrepresenting any critical long-term issues. The presentation was followed by discussion with the following questions and comments, which focused on:

Prioritization of Guiding Principles

A concern was raised that numbering the Guiding Principles could imply the County is ranking them in terms of priority/importance. It was suggested to include a statement at the beginning of the Introduction Chapter clarifying that the Guiding Principles are not ranked and that their level of importance/priority will vary depending on the context in which they are being discussed. Staff confirmed the numbering is only being used for easy reference and agreed to add clarifying language.

The question was raised about how the County will use the introduction to the Comprehensive Plan and how staff/commissioners are going to prioritize in the future. Staff clarified that the document will lay out the steps for updating a Comprehensive Plan Element and creating a new project or initiative, which includes consideration of the current Plan element goals and metrics and identifying where there's alignment with Guiding Principles, or where gaps exist. If something is missing, new metrics can be created. The Introduction will recommend following the six-step public engagement guide and using the community vulnerability index map (CVIM) to identify gaps and inform community engagement plans and communication. For more operationally focused updates related to sanitary sewer or stormwater management, for example, the CVIM can be used to identify gaps in communities that are more vulnerable to environmental risks, which can then inform the Capital Improvement Plan and resource allocation in those areas.

What do we want Arlington to look like?

One participant noted that the terminology in the principle statements is so broad that it is at risk of becoming a "laundry list of everything that could conceivably be." The question was raised, "What do we want Arlington to look like?", highlighting the desire to address the amount of density to be planned. "How dense do we want to be? Do we want Arlington to become Brooklyn over time, or do we want Arlington to kind of maintain the transit-oriented development, or is there another model that we want?" It was suggested that before the County updates the General Land Use Plan (GLUP), the community should reach consensus on density and other issues.

Someone mentioned that while the Guiding Principles are idealistic and hopeful and really typify why we love living in Arlington, more needs to be added to ensure the County has a shot at meeting its goals. Others stated they were comfortable with the Guiding Principles being high-level and “really out there,” noting that while the County won’t meet some of the “over-arching stretch goals,” not having them would be worse.

Equity

One participant asked why five of the seven Guiding Principles include the terms accessibility, equity and equitable access, when ‘interwoven equity’ was ranked lower (by the community) in terms of level of importance compared to the other APA Guiding Principles. “Do these Guiding Principles truly reflect the priorities of the community or are they the priorities of the staff? Is the inclusive Arlington guiding principle enough?” Staff noted that the County is committed to equity and the Equitable Development Principles (adopted in 2024), which were foundational when drafting the Guiding Principles for Arlington. Staff also noted that many of the comments on what is missing in the Guiding Principle Statements that staff received centered around equity.

Community Engagement

Staff was praised for engaging with different groups of people in this process, including those who are hard-to-reach, however, it was suggested that staff engage specifically with the civic associations, Civic Federation, and/or Arlington’s Neighborhood Advisory Commission to get neighborhood level input before any decisions are made. One participant mentioned that it is not as simple as trusting the process because many people haven’t been pleased with the Expanded Housing Options (EHO), Missing Middle and other processes. While the community acknowledges that “staff is listening carefully and trusts their integrity, dedication, hard work and expertise, the County should do what is necessary to make this document even more inclusive, better and relevant to the existing 12 Comprehensive Plan Elements.”

Draft Guiding Principles

1. Livable and Thriving Arlington

It was recommended that Supporting Statement 1.2 (Housing That Meets Community Needs) clearly reference the need for different housing types including accessible housing and housing for people with different income levels and at different stages of life. Staff was praised for referencing universal design and accessibility for the disabled in terms of housing and transportation, as it aligns with the Americans with Disability Act, Fair Housing Act and construction code, however, it was noted that some references do not align well and improvements could be made to make that clearer.

There was a concern that statement 1.1 (World Class Placemaking and Urban Design) suggesting to “create high quality spaces through visually appealing architecture” is too vague and subjective. More clarity on what works, or not, is recommended to be able to guide the design of projects. There was also a concern about designing buildings today that may be adapted for different uses in the future. Two questions were raised, “Are we looking at technology, materials and what the sun and climate are doing to buildings? Are we requiring that buildings be conscious of these changes and how fast the technology is evolving and moving?” Staff noted the Supporting Statements also reference biophilic design, culturally

responsive public art and locally inspired architecture but agreed that more clarity can be provided.

It was recommended to add the words ‘integrate’ and ‘specific’ to Supporting Statement 1.5 - “Strengthen Arlington's identity by protecting historic resources, highlighting and integrating cultural heritage and locally specific architecture” – noting that development and preservation are mutually reinforcing and the word ‘inspired’ is too vague. “There are specific designs unique to Arlington that lend itself well to the urban fabric - without precluding growth, density and creativity – while bringing in the past and looking to the future.”

2. Inclusive Arlington

Staff were praised for highlighting the need for ‘diverse and meaningful engagement, noting that the formats of events aren’t always accessible.

3. Sustainability and Environmentally Just Arlington

There was a concern that climate mitigation is not explicitly mentioned. Noting that Supporting Statement 3.7 (Clean and Renewable Energy) is one of several paths to mitigation, a suggestion was made to add a climate mitigation statement that incorporates 3.7: “reduce emissions across sectors, especially buildings and transport by promoting clean and renewable energy, energy efficiency and beneficial electrification and sustainable transportation options.” It was also suggested to make 3.1 two separate statements so environmental justice and environmental stewardship stand on their own.

Staff were praised for recognizing climate, urban biophilia and equity as priorities, however, it was recommended that nature be integrated across all 12 elements of the Comprehensive Plan. There is concern that tree canopy and open spaces are often an afterthought, stressing that density should be evaluated from a nature standpoint to ensure there is sufficient nature for everyone in the County, not just certain parts.

It was recommended that the lizard symbol be added under more principle Supporting Statements to emphasize the idea of human and natural systems working together. It was recommended to be added specifically under Educational Facilities in the Infrastructure Ready principle, noting that the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission is looking at the maintenance of natural spaces and trees in school grounds. It was also recommended to be added under Cooperative Growth and Land Use Planning in the Regionally Collaborative principle, noting that EcoAction Arlington is working on ways to improve tree conservation at the regional level.

4. Healthy and Safe Arlington

There was no discussion on this draft guiding principle.

5. Economically and Socially Resilient Arlington

It was recommended to add ‘education’ (high schools, universities and training facilities) to Supporting Statement 5.2 (Economic Diversification and Investment) as an anchor in thriving mixed-use places, given so many universities are moving to the region and it is something we want to encourage in Arlington.

6. Regionally Collaborative Arlington

It was recommended to adjust the principle statement to highlight the importance of collaborating on matters affecting the County and beyond (not just the County), stressing that changes we make in Arlington affect the surrounding area. It was also recommended to add 'reliable' to Supporting Statement 6.2 (Transportation Planning and Services), noting that if transportation is not reliable, it cannot be used.

7. Infrastructure Ready Arlington

There was a concern that while information technology is a key aspect of how the County operates and delivers services, it is not highlighted well in the Guiding Principles and there are several aspects (i.e., networks and other infrastructure, data and privacy, governance, and digital literacy) that are missing, noting that technology is more than broadband infrastructure.

It was noted that 'networks' are not listed under critical infrastructure, while emphasizing that in the 21st century access to data is as important as access to water, electricity, and sewer. Smart Cities technologies were identified as more than just an economic development opportunity, noting that it should be viewed like any other infrastructure project that needs to be delivered across the County, with dedicated resources, to meet community needs. It was recommended to include the goal of "maximizing the value of Connect Arlington", noting the Broadband Infrastructure Feasibility Study frames the dark fiber network as strategically valuable but it is not currently leveraged to its full potential.

Data was identified as a valuable asset that should be retained by the public so that it can be protected, managed, and shared responsibly across the region. It was noted that data privacy is a fundamental civil right that should be addressed in the Guiding Principles.

It was also noted that a board level policy is needed to ensure better governance of (and resource allocation for) information technology, including establishing consistency across departments regarding the types of information that should be available (as public record) on County websites. "Using technology to facilitate open data, open government, and civic engagement will build trust in the community."

Given that the County is a trusted source for public health and safety information, promoting digital literacy was identified as a key priority under education.

Public Comments

A total of five (5) speakers provided public comments with one resident speaking on behalf of Arlingtonians for a Sustainable Future.

Density and Land Use Mix

One public commenter noted the conflict between Supporting Statements for "growing housing supply" and "protecting historic resources" and several offered diverse views on density. Those in support of more density noted that the number of renters in high-density buildings is significantly higher and continues to grow, highlighting the need for more housing. Some commenters expressed a desire for increased density, particularly around Metro stations, noting that placing apartment buildings on busy roads, highways and intersections but also leaving

property that is only steps from Metro untouched is not equitable. Some suggested that more discussion on density is needed - even if there are strong opinions on both sides. Some said it is needed to embrace equity and economic resilience by expanding growth beyond the narrow corridors where we have it now. "There's different levels that work in different parts, but we should be growing." Additionally, there was a desire to increase retail (small commercial, coffee shops, etc.) in neighborhoods and public facilities in Metro corridors. Those who are not in support of more density pointed to the County's current vision and goals (i.e., retention of predominantly residential character) established over 50 years ago, which in their opinion, was "a pivotal point in forming the compact on urban environment we know today and helped Arlington protect its low-density residential neighborhoods while planning for the expansion of Metro".

Prioritization of Guiding Principles

There was a concern that fiscal responsibility is not emphasized enough in the Guiding Principles, which some expressed as important factor in making recommendations. Using cost-benefit analysis of the aspirations before the County Board makes a decision was suggested. It was also suggested that the Comprehensive Plan be operationally focused on maintaining public services and safety, noting the Principle Healthy and Safe Arlington is key.

The question about why the Guiding Principles are being framed as priorities was raised, noting the purpose of the introductory chapter is to say the Guiding Principles seek to harmonize and bring things into balance not that we need to choose one or the other.

Review Process

It was recommended the LRPC have an opportunity to review the full introduction draft before the RTA draft is shared with the County Board.

Next Steps

Staff noted that community engagement will continue into June and that staff will review and analyze the feedback on the Guiding Principles to complete the draft Introduction, which is expected to be shared with the LRPC and other commissions in the fall. The LRPC expressed appreciation to staff for their work and commissioners/advisory board representatives for their participation and input.

Chair Steinberger adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:00 p.m.