

American Planning Association (APA)
Guiding Principles- Sustaining Places: Best Practices for Comprehensive Plans

APA Best Practices Principles for Comprehensive Plans	Principle Explanation/Why is it relevant	Arlington County Corresponding Cross Cutting Issue/Emerging Priority
<p style="text-align: center;">Interwoven Equity: <i>"Ensure fairness and equity in providing for the housing, services, health, safety, and livelihood needs of all citizens and groups". ¹</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">¹: APA PAS 578 Report</p>	<p>"Equity in the provision of community decisions and services involves the fair distribution of benefits and costs. It results from applying basic fairness tests that ask whether the needs of the full range of the population served—rich and poor, young and old, native and immigrant—are served. Because disadvantaged, young, or immigrant populations often do not participate in debates over community policies and programs, their needs may fail to be recognized. Poor, underserved, and minority populations are often disproportionately affected by polluting land uses and natural disasters. Because such populations may not have the skills or community connections necessary for access to jobs, economic resources, and health care, the community may have to provide special programs to assist them. Decent, affordable housing is another critical need that falls under this principle. By weaving equity questions into the comprehensive plan, the community and its government can ensure the consideration of “who benefits” as it develops its policies, priorities, and expenditures."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Equity/Leading with RACE Access to Services (including Technology Accessibility)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Livable Built Environment: <i>"Ensure that all elements of the built environment, including land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure, work together to provide sustainable, green places for living, working, and recreation, with a high quality of life". ¹</i></p>	<p>"The built environment encompasses physical features (such as buildings, streets, and utilities) and the systems and processes associated with them (such as movement of people, flow of water). As such, it defines the multifaceted community that people experience through their daily lives—the places where they live, work, and recreate. Because the built environment shapes quality of life for the entire population, sustaining its livability and ensuring that it functions at the highest possible level are primary tasks for comprehensive planning. Traditional comprehensive plans typically treat the different components of the built environment as separate elements, such as land use and transportation. However, the built environment is a complex system made up of many interacting and dynamic elements, and planners face ongoing challenges in sustaining and coordinating the overall system as well as its component parts. By virtue of its scope and mandate, the comprehensive plan is the logical tool for an integrated systems approach to ensuring a livable built environment." ¹</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">People-Centric Planning & Design</p>

APA Best Practices Principles for Comprehensive Plans	Principle Explanation/Why is it relevant	Arlington County Corresponding Cross Cutting Issue/Emerging Priority
<p>Healthy [and Safe] Community: <i>"Ensure that public health needs are recognized and addressed through provisions for healthy foods, physical activity, access to recreation, health care, environmental justice, and safe neighborhoods."</i></p>	<p>"The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The Healthy Community principle and the previous four principles work together to support the mission of public health: to fulfill society's interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy (Institute of Medicine 1988). In a healthy community, residents are assured that the air and water are safe, open space and recreation are convenient to use, local food outlets are located near neighborhoods, public schools and access to health care are provided equitably, and active public safety programs are in place. Because the normal operations of the private economic market may not ensure that these common public benefits are uniformly available, it may be necessary for the government to fill the gaps. For example, disadvantaged neighborhoods are often located in unsafe or unhealthy areas of the community, such as brownfields or floodplains, and public programs may be needed to address these locational hazards. The comprehensive plan is the appropriate tool for identifying and mitigating public health hazards, and for promoting effective healthy community goals."</p>	<p>Aging in Place Public Health Safety Food security</p>
<p>Harmony with Nature: <i>Ensure that the contributions of natural resources to human well-being are explicitly recognized and valued and that maintaining their health is a primary objective.</i></p>	<p>"The natural environment comprises the earth's interrelated systems of air, water, soil, and vegetation and their ongoing processes. Human well-being depends upon a healthy natural environment to provide the services of nourishing food, breathable air, drinkable water, hazard protection, energy, and spiritual sustenance. Because urban development and human activities can disturb nature's balance and damage the resources it provides, comprehensive plans and implementation programs must monitor the health of and mitigate negative impacts to the natural environment. A healthy environment is a common resource that belongs to everyone but is owned by no one. Therefore, the community through its plan must advocate for, and present the value of, the contributions of natural systems and services to the triple bottom line (environment, economy, and equity). While some natural resources are protected through separate functional plans, such as those for air and water quality, the comprehensive plan is the proper tool for the overall coordination and maintenance of natural systems within the full community and regional context. This includes integrating natural features and processes into the built environment (the Livable Built Environment principle)."</p>	<p>Sustainability/Smart growth Climate Resiliency Biophilia</p>

APA Best Practices Principles for Comprehensive Plans	Principle Explanation/Why is it relevant	Arlington County Corresponding Cross Cutting Issue/Emerging Priority
<p>Resilient Economy: <i>"Ensure that the community is prepared to deal with both positive and negative changes in its economic health and to initiate sustainable urban development and redevelopment strategies that foster green business growth and build reliance on local assets."</i></p>	<p>"The community's economy is made up of the businesses, trades, productive facilities, and related activities that provide the livelihoods of the population. Economic health is critical in providing jobs and incomes to support the community; as it rises or falls, so do the livelihoods of people. Because local economies depend upon outside (regional, national, and even global) inputs and trends, their employment base is affected not only by local business formation and activity but also by the decisions of distant firms or governments. Therefore, more reliance on local assets increases the economic resilience of the community, as well as contributing to place-based revitalization. Because some productive activities generate negative impacts, green businesses (such as solar-powered energy systems) may be preferable to those with greater impacts and can reduce reliance on outside resources (imported fossil fuels, for example). Although some communities develop and implement separate economic development strategies, the comprehensive plan provides the instrument for placing those strategies within the context of the broader community development agenda."</p>	<p>Economic Opportunity Commercial Market Resiliency</p>
<p>Responsible Regionalism: <i>Ensure that all local proposals account for, connect with, and support the plans of adjacent jurisdictions and the surrounding region.</i></p>	<p>Regional planning agencies, although typically without regulatory authority, provide perspectives broad enough to encompass the scope of various regional systems, such as transportation and water supply, which extend beyond local jurisdictional boundaries. As authorized by federal surface transportation legislation, transportation planning is the core responsibility of designated metropolitan planning agencies (MPOs). Increasingly, progressive MPOs and other regional planning agencies are addressing other issues with regional implications, such as open space and environmental protection, housing, economic development, utility infrastructure, and hazard mitigation. Because regional agencies coordinate the activities of groups of local governments, they provide an institutional setting for joint decision making that transcends local politics. From the local governmental perspective, the plans and policies of adjacent jurisdictions have reciprocal impacts, in terms of factors such as the location of new development, commuting patterns, and stormwater flows. Therefore, connecting these plans and policies through the comprehensive plan is a way to understand and manage these and other overlapping functions, such as regional greenway systems, and to responsibly integrate a community's plan with those of its neighbors.</p>	

Principles For Equitable Development

Adopted by Arlington County on April 24, 2024

Process Principles for Planning and Policy Development:

Acknowledge history and repair past harms

Document the historical harm caused to communities of color by the actions of government through planning, housing and development to identify the connections between those actions and today's racially disparate outcomes.

Practice inclusive and meaningful community engagement

Require local community participation and leadership in decision-making to reflect a diversity of voices, use power mapping with an equity lens to design equitable decision-making structures that account for differences in power amongst stakeholders, and include targeted strategies to engage and compensate historically marginalized communities, and voices representing future residents. Build cultural competence into planning processes and design planning processes and materials to be clear, accessible and engaging for culturally diverse stakeholders.

Commit to implementation with internal capacity and community transparency

Implement equitable development policies with sufficient dedicated budget, organizational structures, and staff trained in equitable planning practices to sustain and grow jurisdictions' capacity to follow through on their adopted policies. Develop public facing accountability tools designed with community engagement and tie them to meaningful budget and policy processes to measure jurisdictions' performance and monitor regional racial disparities.

Policy Outcomes Principles:

Advance economic opportunity and mobility

Promote generational wealth building, local economic development, and entrepreneur opportunities including local minority businesses participating in publicly supported capital projects and real estate development. Work with the private sector to avoid and mitigate displacement of businesses during construction of new projects, enhance community serving establishments with capital and capacity building supports, and increase career pathways for quality living wage jobs for people in all neighborhoods.

Prevent displacement

Develop government regulations, policies, and programs to mitigate economic pressures and allow anyone who wants to continue living in a community to do so as it grows, especially for residents vulnerable to displacement pressures due to systemic racism and economic insecurity and prevent displacement of small businesses that serve communities experiencing displacement pressure including preventing predatory speculation of property in communities at risk of displacement.

Expand affordable housing options and preserve existing affordability

Create and preserve healthy, safe, and long-term affordable housing for all family sizes, abilities, ages, and incomes to create integrated, inclusive communities in all neighborhoods through a mix of publicly supported strategies scaled to meet the actual housing need of the region's population growth and communities who have experienced housing discrimination.

Support and strengthen diverse community values

Respect the local culture, character, and diverse values of a community by uplifting existing cultural resources as valuable assets of a community.

Promote people-centered multi-modal mobility and connectivity

Prioritize effective, safe, dignified, healthy, and affordable multi-modal transportation choices for all residents. Support transit-dependent communities and provide equitable access to core services and amenities, including employment, education, health and social services.

Develop healthy and safe communities

Design built environments that enhance health opportunities for communities currently experiencing racial disparities in health through public amenities (schools, parks, open spaces, transportation, complete streets, health care, and other services), access to affordable healthy food, physical exercise, improved air quality, and safe and inviting environments.

Promote and regulate for environmental justice

Work across silos within government and across other sectors to eliminate disproportionate and harmful environmental burdens on any community. Enact regulations and secure resources to mitigate and reverse the effects of environmental hazards past and present that have disproportionately harmed communities of color.