



# Neighborhood Conservation Program Review

Working Group Meeting #12

# Meeting Agenda

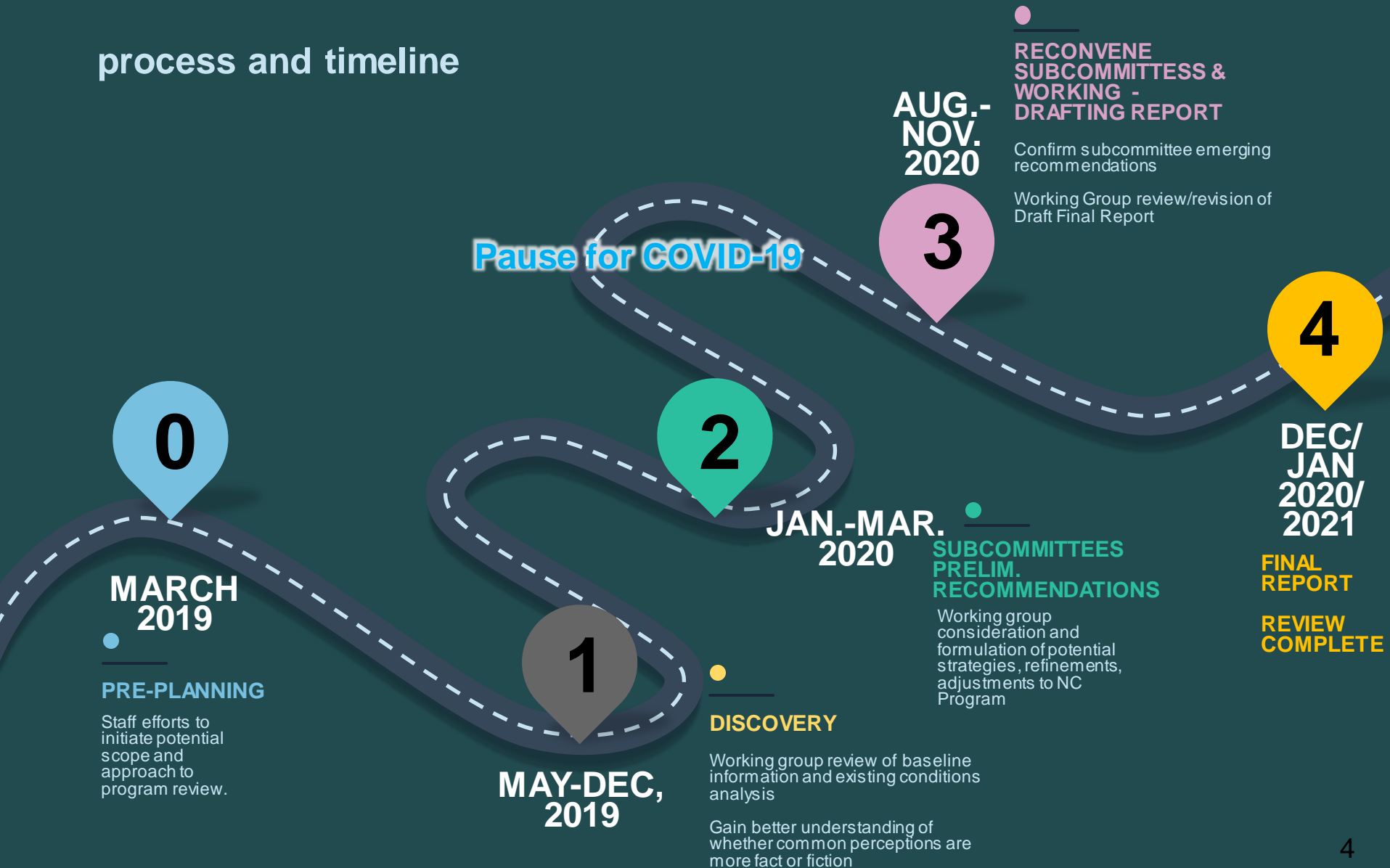
	(approx. time)
1. <b>Process Overview</b>	5 min
2. <b>Program Review Report: Second Draft Status</b>	5 min
3. <b>Highlighting Key Revisions</b>	10 min
4. <b>Discussion</b>	60 min
5. <b>Next Steps</b>	5 min
6. <b>Adjourn</b>	



# Process Overview

# Neighborhood Conservation Program Review

## process and timeline



# Program Review Report

Timeline and Status Update

# Evolution of NC Review Draft Report

DATE	ACTIONS/STATUS
<b>Late Summer – Early Fall 2020</b>	<b>Staff Began Drafting of NC Program Review Report</b>
<b>Nov. 6, 2020</b>	<b>Shared First Draft of Final Report with Working Group</b>
<b>Nov. 9, 2020</b>	<b>NC Program Review Meeting #11</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion/Initial comments on Executive Summary and Recommendations</li> </ul>
<b>Nov. 20, 2020</b>	<b>Deadline for Follow-Up Comments from NCPR Working Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comments received from 5 of 12 community WG Members</li> <li>• Staff review/comments also provided during this time</li> </ul>
<b>Dec. 11, 2020</b>	<b>Shared Second Draft with NCPR Working Group</b>
<b>Dec. 16, 2020</b>	<b>NC Program Review Meeting #12 – Discussion on Second Draft</b>
<b>Dec. 23, 2020</b>	<b>Deadline for Follow-Up Comments from NCPR Working Group</b>

## **\*\*Comments on November Draft**

- Executive Summary Enhancements
  - Add text on purpose of document/study impetus
  - Better summarize findings
  - Clarify who recommendations are directed at, and have them stand out more
  
- Petitioning process – clarify intent on removing/refining; frontage-based weighting; and voice of renters
  
- Clarify the issue of whether the program favors Single Family areas vs. Multifamily areas, and if so, why?
  
- NC versus NCS: both programs involve safety (*but may vary in data metrics*)

## **\*\*Comments on November Draft**

- Re-ordering of Strategies that present the recommendations
- Clarify information related to non-NC Project Comparisons
- Try to add more info on why some areas don't participate; how do we know?
- Picture choices and placement – reduce redundancy



# Highlighting Key Revisions

A Few Highlights



## Neighborhood Conservation Program Review

An evaluation of over 50 years of community-based  
planning and development in Arlington County

December 2020  
DRAFT – VERSION 2

- Cover photo images to better reflect spectrum of NC projects

## Sample page

DRAFT VERSION – 12/9/2020

2020 NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PROGRAM REVIEW

### Executive Summary

Since 1964, Arlington County's Neighborhood Conservation (NC) Program has fostered civic engagement through resident-led planning and collective decision-making, and it has enhanced residential neighborhoods through hundreds of physical improvements. NC projects range in scope, but predominantly focus on the following infrastructure projects:

- Installation of sidewalks, curbs and gutters;
- Installation of streetlights;
- Park improvements and renovations;
- Neighborhood art;
- Beautification;
- Traffic management;
- Pedestrian safety improvements;
- Neighborhood signs; and
- Stormwater management.

The Program's bottom-up nature is distinct from and complements other County programs that focus on data metrics and County priorities and are pursued on the County's timeline. The Program offers a means for residents to surface needs and implement community goals. In some cases, NC projects might not be implemented by any other County program. Civic associations prepare a neighborhood plan reflective of community conditions and needs, and the plan serves as a guide for future planning efforts, including potential neighborhood-based improvement projects. The program offers a means for residents to implement community goals through an annual competitive process for funding, predominantly focused on the following infrastructure projects:

This Neighborhood Conservation Program Review is the first known comprehensive evaluation in the program's fifty-year history and the culmination of more than a year of collaboration between County staff and resident volunteers. The impetus for the review came from perceptions among County leadership that significant cost increases, longer implementation schedules for NC projects, and inequitable distribution of projects may indicate problems with the Program's efficacy. During the adoption of the FY2019 – FY2020 Capital Improvement Plan, the County Board recognized a need to better understand the Program and ways in which neighborhood conditions have impacted it. At the direction of the Board, the County Manager formed a working group to evaluate the Program. This review is intended to inform future capital improvement programs, organizational decisions in Arlington, and NC program policies through a series of recommended strategies and actions.

During the review, the working group identified valuable program strengths, dispelled misunderstandings about Program inefficiencies, equity, and cost effectiveness, and identified areas for improvement. These findings are presented in Section 1 and 2 of this report. Section 3 presents case study examples that highlight lessons learned from planning work and project implementation. Finally, Section 4 presents recommended strategies and actions to further refine and enhance the Neighborhood Conservation Program.

This review is intended to inform future capital improvement programs, organizational decisions in Arlington and NC Program policies through a series of recommendations targeted to County leadership, staff, and the NCAC.

- Added more narrative on context and impetus for study
- Text revisions to address comments regarding tone
- Added context for Equity Resolution/Pilot Project
- Refined language for Program Strengths and Challenges
- Re-ordered Recommended Strategies
- Noted implementation framework and next steps

## Background + Program Overview

### Sample page

DRAFT VERSION – 12/3/2020

2020 NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PROGRAM REVIEW

#### Program Review Background

While the Neighborhood Conservation Program is recognized nationally<sup>2</sup> as an asset to Arlington County, the program has experienced several challenges in implementation. Project costs have dramatically increased over the last decade across capital projects and County programs, including within the Neighborhood Conservation (NC) Program. NC Program funding has not increased to keep pace with the rising costs, and most recently, was significantly reduced. The convergence of higher project costs and recent reductions in funding has resulted in the inability of the Program to keep pace with community demand for neighborhood infrastructure improvements. As a result, the NC Program is completing substantially fewer projects now than in earlier years. This slower pace has increased the time in which proposed projects wait for funding approval, lengthening the already time-intensive planning and engagement work.

These challenges have raised questions about the program's efficacy in recent years. County leadership has recognized a need to better understand the program's strengths, areas for improvement, and how neighborhood conditions have impacted the program. At the adoption of the Fiscal Years 2019–2023 Capital Improvement Plan, the County Board directed the County Manager to appoint a body to evaluate this program's ability to deliver infrastructure in an efficient, cost-effective, equitable, and timely manner, the first known comprehensive review in the program's history. This review will also inform future Capital Improvement Programs, organizational decisions, and NC Program Policies through a series of recommended strategies and actions.

#### Working Group Efforts



An 18-member working group was established and formally commenced its work in May 2019. Co-chaired by one community member and one staff member, the working group membership was composed to include a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds. The working group includes twelve citizens and six staff members from the Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development (CPHD), Department of Environmental Services (DES), and the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). The working group process began with a "Discovery Phase," focused on learning the history and operating procedures of the NC program, and gaining

<sup>2</sup> Arlington's NC Program was the subject of a best practice publication by the International City/County Management Association and has appeared in national academic journals. These materials are available via: <https://projects.arlingtonva.us/neighborhood-conservation/nc-plan-program/neighborhood-conservation-program-review/neighborhood-conservation-program-review-documents/>

- Refined language throughout to better clarify certain points
- Expanded NCAC text to clarify their greatest areas of influence; explain why certain areas may not participate
- Reframed narrative regarding how NC Plans interact w/ other plans/development
- Updated NCS Write up

# Notable Revisions – Section 2

## Project Production + Cost Analysis

Sample page

NC Projects Related to Non White Populations



- Inserted more language regarding role of stormwater infrastructure as part of NC
- Inserted spotlight narrative regarding Racial Equity and NC Program *(and added map of projects and non-white populations)*
- Revised narrative regarding Project Costs, and also Program Funding

		Census Tracts with the Following Proportion of Non-White Population					
		< 20% Non-White		20-59% Non-White		60% + Non-White	
		#	% Countywide	#	% Countywide	#	% Countywide
Countywide							
Total Population	231,803	36,797	15.87%	164,812	71.10%	30,194	13.03%
Non-White*	88,649	5,379		60,778		22,491	
Hispanic	36,180	1,933		24,206		10,041	
Black	20,048	783		11,357		7,908	

## NC Program Case Studies

Sample page



- Added Oak Grove Park Case Study
- A third case study that highlights a street improvement project will be inserted into Section 3

Section 3:  
NC Program Case Studies

### Sample page

DRAFT VERSION – 12/3/2020      2020 NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PROGRAM REVIEW

#### Strategy 2

#### Expand ~~and streamline~~ financial resources to the NC Program

The County has not funded the NC Program at a pace consistent with rising project costs from more stringent regulations (and adherence to them) and higher material and labor costs. In the last few years, the NC Program budget decreased by more than half, ~~lagging other programs~~. Since the NC Program relies on general obligation bonds as its sole source of funding, the reduction in Program funds has severely reduced the program’s capacity to meet community demand. Given the cost escalations documented in Section 2, the Program warrants increased resources. With more funding, project timelines would generally decrease, and the program would be able to support a larger number of projects per year. ~~NC staff should clarify cost escalation triggers to justify increased resources.~~

To stretch County dollars further and deliver even more projects, the NCAC and NC staff should pursue several other actions to reduce financial strain on the program: 1) explore new partnerships that would bolster non-County financial resources, 2) encourage a well-balanced mix of larger and smaller projects and consider incentives for less costly solutions, 3) promote earlier staff involvement to mitigate cost overruns from regulatory compliance, and 4) use the Capital Improvement Plan to inform NC projects selection and flag opportunities where non-NC capital and maintenance projects can augment the NC program.

##### 2.1 Expand County resources to keep pace with increases in costs.

Funding has not kept pace with the increase in project costs. The program’s funding shortfall has severely limited the project production rate of the NC program. When more funding is available in a given year, the NC Program can select projects for construction more quickly and have higher levels of production. The increased demand for new school facilities to meet population projections and expanded capital improvements to the regional transportation system, among other investments, has strained the County’s ability to more fully fund the NC Program, particularly in the last decade.

If program funding continues to remain at a level that does not address cost increases, other recommendations in this report would not fully address the areas flagged for improvement. The County vision for neighborhoods and their infrastructure (see Strategy 1.1) should inform funding appropriations across infrastructure programs and other policy priorities.

For the current level of funding, program staffing is adequate. If funding or scope of NC program work increases, the program could recalibrate staff working on other projects, add full-time employees, or seek contractor support to expand County capacity.

##### 2.2 Explore new partnerships that would bolster resources supporting the program.

The NC program currently relies on one funding source: general obligation bonds. The County’s ability to borrow debt has limited the resources to the NC Program, given the demand for other infrastructure investments the growing population needs. The funding trends in the last decade have drastically reduced project production and the program’s ability to meet demand for infrastructure projects. County investments could be strategically used to attract private and public resources to the program, and should be investigated by the NCAC. A small working group (assigned by the NCAC) may consider:

- Grant opportunities with nonprofits, businesses, organizations, and foundations. The work group could flag which opportunities should be pursued by the County, neighborhoods, and

- Reordered strategies based on Working Group input
- Revised language throughout to clarify or more accurately convey recommendations/points
- Introduced notion of Implementation Framework *(even if just addressed administratively)*

# Discussion



# Discussion Questions

- Any reactions to the content or placement of the equity spotlight in the Executive Summary and in Section 2?
- Do the revisions strike a balanced tone?
- Does the Executive Summary present sufficient context about why we are here, what we found, and where we propose going next?
- Do the revisions better convey points and recommendations?
- Are there additional revisions (at a high level) that staff should consider?

# Next Steps

# Proposed Next Steps

- Staff to finalize and share the street improvement case study with the Working Group by end of 2020
- Final Working Group comments due by December 23
- Staff to make final edits end of 2020/early 2021
- Share final draft with the Working Group in early January
- Share final report with the County Manager by mid-January
- County Manager may decide if/how to engage County Board on Final Report and review findings
- Celebrate our work together in Spring 2021!

