

Arlington County’s Smart Growth Journey, Rosslyn – Ballston Corridor – Implementing the General Land Use Plan

2017 American Planning Association National Planning Achievement Award for Implementation

For over 50 years, Arlington County Virginia’s General Land Use Plan (GLUP), a core element of the County’s Comprehensive Plan, has served as the primary guide for Arlington’s Smart Growth Journey. During this period, Arlington has experienced a remarkable transformation from a suburban, auto centric collection of neighborhoods to one of this country’s most recognized examples of the benefits of smart growth, sustainability, walkability and transit oriented development. As a regional, national and international model of smart growth, Arlington, has demonstrated through the GLUP, and its allied Comprehensive Plan elements, policies, programs and zoning, how the mistakes and impacts of suburban sprawl can be corrected and avoided through a visionary and continuous commitment to innovative planning. As noted by Christopher Leinberger, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution “Arlington is the most important suburban place in the country,” and “If you don’t understand Arlington, you don’t understand the future of the country.”¹

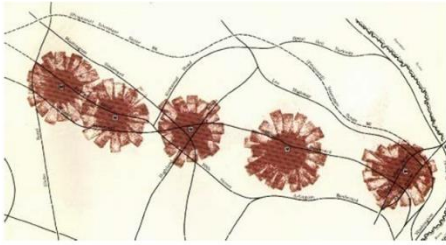
Transformational Journey Begins

Arlington County’s historic commitment to visionary and implementation based planning began in the 1960’s as northern Virginia and the Metro Washington region were first faced with the impacts of expanding suburban sprawl, accelerating reliance on the automobile and the introduction of the interstate highway system. The Arlington County Board, Planning Commission, citizens and professional planners recognized early that significant impacts would result if a primary land use planning and policy guide was not in place as a central part of the County’s Comprehensive Plan. The importance of focusing growth, preserving low density neighborhoods, and fully integrating land use and transportation planning were key planning principles.

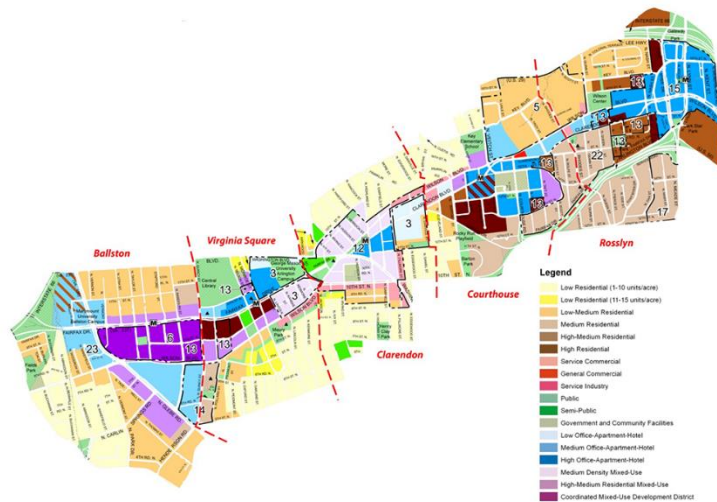
As regional planning advanced for both Interstate 66 and the Metro transit system in the 1960’s and 1970’s, the County fully embraced long range planning, including a landmark decision that recognized the importance that transit could play in both concentrating growth and supporting and activating existing and potential mixed use transit centers. The “Bulls Eye” concept for the Rosslyn – Ballston corridor was a visionary land use policy decision that relocated the planned Metro Orange line away from the median of Interstate 66 to the commercial spine of central Arlington along Wilson and Clarendon Boulevards. This decision was incorporated as part of the GLUP in 1975 and, together with

¹The Suburb of the Future is Here, Salon, July 6, 2014.

The Bull's Eye Concept Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor



The General Land Use Plan (GLUP) Today Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor



Early transit based planning for the Jefferson – Davis Metro corridor and Pentagon City, marked one of the earliest commitments by a suburban community to what today is considered Smart Growth. The County expanded on the GLUP's core planning principles in the form of sector plans for each Metro station area in order to provide further guidance on the County's expectations for transit oriented growth. In addition, the County developed incentive based zoning to enable greater density, as envisioned by the GLUP, and to realize specific community benefits and urban design features envisioned by the sector plans.

The Journey Results in an Unprecedented Commitment to Planning, Plan Implementation and Place Making

Today, as a result of Arlington's Smart Growth Journey, residents, businesses, employees and visitors experience the results of an unprecedented commitment to Metro Station area and corridor planning that's success can be measured in part as follows:

- Seven (7) mixed use, walkable and bicycle friendly Metro transit villages with over 71,000 (220,400 total population) residents and 136,900 (211,000 total jobs) employees;
- Over 6 million square feet of highly diverse retail space has been retained or developed;
- The 36 million sq. ft. of office space within the two Metro corridors is greater than many downtowns;
- Focused high density commercial growth within 11% of the County's 25 square miles and one-quarter mile of Metro stations produce nearly 50% of the County's real estate revenue;
- Residential demand remains high with over 8,000 units constructed since 2010;
- Over 27% of residents rely on transit for their daily work commute; reduced traffic on many local streets and an increase in the number of residents who walk to work that is almost double the national average;
- 12% of residents have no car and less than 41% have 2 or more cars; and over 6% of County residents telework; and

- Low density neighborhoods and commercial districts enjoy one of the lowest tax burdens in the Washington Metropolitan area.

Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor

1979

Today



Ballston Metro

Virginia Square Metro

Clarendon Metro

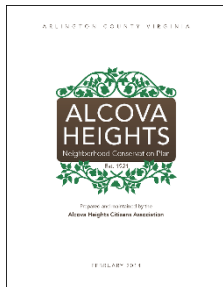


Ballston Metro

Virginia Square Metro

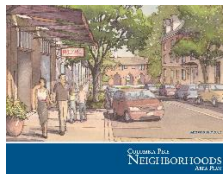
Expanding the Commitment to Planning Beyond the Metro Corridors

Expanding and solidifying the County's commitment to sound and proactive planning beyond the Metro corridors has also been fundamental to Arlington County's ongoing Smart Growth Journey. Planning has further advanced through the following efforts, many of which have or will be incorporated as part of the Comprehensive Plan and GLUP.



Neighborhood Conservation and Special Revitalization District Plans

Arlington applies its experience with thoughtful long-range planning, smart growth and urban design principles to the conservation of the County's diverse neighborhoods. Through the County's Neighborhood Conservation Plans, neighborhoods organize to develop a ten year vision through a community-led process. Today there are over 50 neighborhood conservation plans.



Columbia Pike Commercial Areas and Neighborhoods Plans - Form Based Code

Columbia Pike is often described as Arlington's "Main Street," and that was exactly the vision defined through an intensive and community-based planning effort and the resulting Form Based Code.



Lee Highway Corridor Initiative

This is a unique and joint effort between Arlington County and the Lee Highway Alliance (LHA) to achieve a vision for the unplanned corridor and identify actions and strategies through a multi-year planning program that will begin in 2017.

Addressing Challenges and Opportunities – The Smart Growth Journey Continues

The course of Arlington’s Smart Growth Journey will continue to be refined through amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and GLUP and allied strategic research and planning that will be necessary to address the following challenges and opportunities.

Sustainable Growth

Every five years the Planning Commission and the County Board conduct a public process to assess the performance of the GLUP and associated elements of the Comprehensive Plan in order to evaluate the course of Arlington County’s Smart Growth Journey. This process, which is now underway, enables the Planning Commission and the County Board to identify potential issues and opportunities and define strategies to improve and support core land use polices and plans.

Affordable Housing

The County’s commitment to Affordable Housing has been advanced through a wide range of planning, zoning and financing tools: GLUP designation of Special Affordable Housing Protection Districts; Establishment of affordable housing dwelling unit zoning provisions for increased density consistent with the GLUP; Establishment of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund; and adoption and implementation of an Affordable Housing Master Plan. Efforts are now focused on preserving market rate affordable units and affordability by design options that will address the “Missing Middle” housing types that can serve middle income households.

Commercial Office Vacancy

As result of recent reductions in federal employment and contractors, regional economic transitions, changes in work place demands, and aging commercial office buildings, the County is pursuing strategies that will enable creative and adaptive reuse of vacant office buildings, such as the recent We Work We Live project in Crystal City which provides co-working spaces and micro living units as part of one of the region’s growing innovation hubs.

Demand for Public Facilities

A Community Facilities Study was recently completed through collaboration between the County, Arlington Public Schools (APS), a citizen committee and the broader community. The Study strategically

addresses community challenges that, if unaddressed, could impact Arlington’s overall sustainability. The Study also advances strategies for planning and investment in public facilities that are necessary to support growth envisioned by the GLUP and associated County demographic and economic forecasts.

Arlington County’s commitment to sound, inclusive and ground breaking planning has and will continue to enable these and other challenges and opportunities to be addressed to ensure our community achieves its vision as a “diverse and world class community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important.” Arlington County’s Smart Growth Journey continues and, as a result of its unique history, evolution and innovation, is recognized as a leading example of American planning achievement.



Robert J. Duffy, FAICP has served as a planning and community development director and land management administrator with town, city and county agencies in the Midwest, North East, New England and Florida. He has also served as a planning commissioner at the city and county levels. Mr. Duffy currently serves as Planning Director with Arlington County’s Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development.