

## DRCA Neighborhood Meeting

Date: February 9, 2026; 730pm

Location: St Andrew's Episcopal Church

County Board Member Guests:

- Susan Cunningham
- Takis Karantonis

Bill Richardson, President DRCA, opened the mtg.

Bill provided an update on the General Assembly status of Delegate Patrick Hope's tree canopy bill. Delegate Hope is seeking to provide local governments with permission to impose greater than the current limit of 20% tree canopy, as measured 10 years from redevelopment (rather than the current 20 years). He is trying to get the authority to do this. Williamsburg has 10-year authority in the existing law. Gov Youngkin has vetoed similar Hope bills for the past two years. Under the version as amended in House committee, 20% would remain the top limit of local authority, except for lots currently designated R10 and R20, which could be subject to a 25% limit.

Question: How is the current legislation implemented individually?

Response: If a construction disturbance is 2500 square feet or larger, the tree preservation plan identifies which trees will be planted and which must be preserved and how the plan complies with the canopy requirement.

Takis Karantonis shared: Different than Virginia has addressed this in the past. This would transcend private property rights. Similar to the protection of stormwater.

Under the bill, tree canopy authority would expand to all jurisdictions in VA should they so choose.

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Two members of the County Board were present – which is the maximum allowed.

Bill provided some background on the pending update to the Comprehensive Plan. State law requires that the Comp Plan be updated every 5 years. The Plan contains 12 components and includes addressing facilities in the community.

1. General Land Use Plan
2. Master Transportation Plan
3. Historic and Cultural Resources Plan
4. Affordable Housing Master Plan
5. Sanitary Sewer Collection System Plan
6. Recycling Program Implementation Plan
7. Forestry and National Resources Plan
8. Public Spaces Master Plan
9. Community Energy Plan
10. Water Distribution Master Plan
11. Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan
12. Stormwater Master Plan

Many comments filed focused on one part of the General Land Use Plan – which guides zoning in Arlington. The existing plan calls for tapering down densification of housing from Metro corridors to outlying neighborhoods.

Some believe there are housing needs that press against this idea.

The DRCA Executive Board letter of December 5, 2025, attached to the agenda for the meeting, expresses concern that it is not clear whether changing this principle is on the table, and that there are varying perspectives about whether and to what extent to make such a change.

Susan Cunningham set context:

For immediate issues within a neighborhood, she recommended going to the county website, select “Report a Problem”. Search “Engage Arlington” to provide all options available. Other mechanisms identified for engagement:

- Email addresses.
- Phone number.
- Public mtgs held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday each month, open for public comment but resident must register online the day prior.
- Open Door Mondays.
- Adding Townhalls: May 4<sup>th</sup>, Oct 26<sup>th</sup>.
- Can join County advisory commissions by applying.
- Can choose Fraud, Waste, Abuse Hotline for anonymous feedback.

## Background of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan started in 1960. The most current 5-year review was conducted in 2023.

Within the Comprehensive Plan, 9 of the 12 elements have been updated more recently. This plan is also forward looking to ensure priorities are appropriate.

Currently county staff are drafting an Introductory Chapter for consideration. In the February 2026 mtg, a general draft will be provided for consideration. This chapter will not change the General Land Use Plan.

This introductory chapter will focus on concepts / principles that are embedded in the 12 areas. The chapter may focus on equity, environment, digitization, customer service. It may also include health, traffic, road design – which may have had different weight than in previous decades. These changes reflect changing demographics over decades.

Engagement: The county board members stated that the county has tried a significant number of engagement activities. Number of individuals who engaged was less than anticipated. Most engagement was conducted in Fall 2025 with some in Spring 2025. The demographics represented are more individuals who are in the 30-40 year old age bracket, are multilingual, viewed as representing a cross section of the community.

Takis: need attention on some of the questions. Discussions are generally narrowly focused on a single building, street, playground. Not as often focused on broader Arlington community.

Susan: In Spring 2025 focused conversations were held in smaller groups, which enabled those individuals to voice concerns. The county hosted 4 community meetings: 2 on line, 2 in person.

Broader engagement was conducted in Fall 2025. Selected individuals were identified who could serve as liaisons between the county and neighborhoods with a focus on equity.

Appreciates that this event brings together multiple neighborhood leaders.

### Next step for Comp Plan:

- Not changing Gen Land Use Plan – at this juncture.
- How to connect the 12 elements of the Plan.
- Identify guiding principles, themes.

Intent is to move gently through items that impact our future.

Takis: The six American Planning Association principles helped structure the conversations. Structure the conversation with a diverse universe of people. Gather reactions of people. Principles helped structure the conversations and will be customized.

Question: What is the status of the separation of sewers vs stormwater in Arlington County.

Response (Takis): Arlington County was constructed after DC so Arlington did not combine sewer and water lines. We have some sanitary water mains cracked but none are intentionally carrying both sewer and water. Most sewer/water lines were constructed/installed after 1935. Some though are close to streets which can cause issues.

Q: Please outline the principles referenced earlier.

Response:

1. Livable built environment, livability is a modern concept. Did not exist in past. Meaning an area is pleasant to live in.
2. Harmony with nature. Concept from the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century – 1990's. 11% of total area is parkland in Arlington.
3. Resilient economy. Arlington is more company town of federal govt so not currently resilient.
4. Interwoven equity. City offers something for everyone if built for everyone. Some zip codes have 10-year differences in life expectancy.
5. Health and Safety. Trees.
6. Responsible Regionalism. Most metro areas encompass 65-70% of US population. Expanding beyond boundaries of downtown and outlying area. Manage common systems such as the Potomac River. In Arlington, we are close to DC.

Bill Richardson Question: About a year ago, Arlington staff suggested language that replace existing goals and objectives and would pave way for Phase 2 – update land use and placemaking goals. 24x7 housing densification. (March 2025 slide)

Susan Responded: None of this will occur unless the Board acts on these suggestions. It means different things to different people.

Takis Responded: Arlington talks a lot and is evolutionary in thought. The county tried to provide a cutting-edge plan at Columbia Pike. Need to define what the principles mean as the current Comprehensive Plan was drafted in the 1960s. When originally drafted, the authors were trying answer how a jurisdiction can absorb growth coming with Metro and federal administration – Pres. Kennedy and Pres Johnson. How infrastructure can be ready such as libraries, parks, schools. The authors understood how Arlington could grow quickly. There were 35,000 jobs created through Pentagon, WW2. Arlington was focused on providing the best public investment and serve as a smart growth town. The Comp Plan mentality was centered on how to deliver services. Today, we could grow, provide a high quality of life community. Now question morphs into anthropocentric. Do we feel happy here? Is our quality of life supported? Does our community grow in qualitative ways? We invest in our school system, investing approx. \$31K/student. The county has invested \$600M in housing and transportation. The question is now whether the county can deliver the service and residents in every neighborhood are happy, do they love their home, do they want to stay here. These principles are a national trend.

Q: Who is the leader/boss of the county staff?

Susan Response: The County manager leads the staff and the County Board hires, fires that the County manager. The County Manager directs the manager and his/her direct reports.

Question: Does the County Manger operate in the best interest of the county residents?

Susan Response: This is a common question / experience for residents. Arlington has had great resident satisfaction compared to national benchmarks. Different boards have had different approaches. Biggest job of Board is managing the Manager. Stronger 360 degree reviews of the manager have been implemented. The County Manager works for all 5 Board members.

Takis Response: The buck stops with the 5 Board members. The Board represents shifting changing politics and constituencies. Political process to instruct the county manager.

Question: In what way?

Takis Response: There are 165 Business Lines in Arlington. 95% of your experience is connected to local govt: lights, air clean, homelessness, disease, police, fire, teachers.

Question: People can provide feedback if they understand the questions asked. There is a complaint about the County Manager and county staff. One example is in regards to how missing middle was handled, RPA's. There needs to be a mechanism to communicate to provide constructive feedback. The County Manager is hired one year at a time.

Susan Response: Arlington county pays for a statistically valid survey every 3-4 years. This is the year it will be conducted – March 2026. The County Board is working with staff to look at response times to questions/issues raised by residents. They understand that they need to work on making response times more visible.

Question: Transparency and accessibility such as at this neighborhood mtg is important.

Takis Response: He shared that he held a mini town hall each week in the past. This has since evolved into the County Board hosting a town hall every week.

Susan Response: Offered that the County Board is open to other offers for ways to engage.

Question: As a civic association, a request has been made to include representatives of the County staff each month. There is generally no reply to these requests and neighborhood associations feel shut out. Instead, neighborhood associations can support county efforts and market attendance with neighbors.

Susan Response: Some of the changes in engagement are grounded in 2013. There were pockets of people knowing pockets of information. The county appreciated that they needed to change to a community driven process. The county then changed the principles of engagement. She understands it's frustrating. Flip side is would rather have 20 people attend representing a broader set of Arlingtonians. She stated that they are continuing to mature this.

Takis Response: In past, if invited, county staffers would attend meetings. For more abstract concepts such as the Comp Plan, the level of intensity from affluent, white communities is higher. After that, the rest of the community accuses the process of being one sided and focused on North Arlington. He doesn't want to risk this. It's problematic and a challenge. For example, the tree canopy goals must be important for every Arlington. Need broader agreement on critical items: housing, health.

Question: You stated that the buck stops with you. The County Board outlines conflicts and make decisions such as on the topic of densification. There is rapid growth, services

needed, affordable housing vs. densification. What creative solutions do you see to solve these?

Susan Response: This is why we must come back to the communities. The county needs to model how growth will affect a region. There is not a lot of ownership housing at some price points. There has been housing built. There is density near metro stations which houses large numbers of people – with more available room to grow. This has worked until now. The County Board made a decision a couple of years ago signaling densification. Housing Arlington in 2019, which is an umbrella inclusive of many tools, policies – included the Missing Middle Study. There was a Condo initiative approx. 50 years ago and it needs a need market capitalization. Prior focus areas such as garden apartments, multi-family dwellings, faith and institutional partnerships ... were placed on back burner. The Missing Middle is still important and needs to be tweaked. The question is how do people want to live and is there a need for multi-generational housing.

Takis Response: There is a conflict implicit between quality vs growth. The reason we grow is that the county is a:

1. Place where jobs are created – investment – wealth.
2. Place that has an excellent school system.

For many years, the county had full employment and the workforce was imported from other areas of the country. Most of us here have relocated here for that reason. A job was waiting for us here. Arlington county generated a skilled workforce.

The question is not how to increase quality from this foundation. Crystal City was a former railyard. When the BRAC occurred, 70K jobs were removed from the county. With the current administration, more jobs are leaving. The County Board is now focused on quality of life.

Quality of growth. 30% of county will be 65+ older. Largest demographic are retiring from workforce and choose to stay and want to age in place. Arlington County has the fastest 25-39 years old demographic – and younger – from college towns such as Charlottesville, Lansing. The middle demographic, approx. 35 years old, the county is experiencing a net OUT migration of this demographic due to housing costs.

County growth today is 1% a year and was previously 37%.

Question: For the area around Pentagon City, county staff conducted “complete planning” for zip code 22202. This was successful. We do not seem to be doing this now.

Susan Response: The mission of the Comp Plan is to elevate – equity, climate, biophilia resolutions – through the Introductory Chapter. They are focused on feedback from community, will iterate, and gain feedback from County Commissions.

Takis Response: Every element within the Comp Plan will be updated. They will go through the critical process focused on topics such as whether there is a master public space plan and the County Board will score the document for compatibility and compliance.

Question: There is a gap in terms of considering affordability of these ideas. Need to focus on “concurrency” of determining that infrastructure is adequate to sustain growth.

Susan Response: Stated that there may be a 7<sup>th</sup> Principle that may be added/proposed.

Takis Response: Infrastructure must be delivered before it is required.

Bill Richardson Question: Need to make sure today that tomorrow will work.

Takis Response: With concurrency the problem is how to deliver infrastructure to where most people need it.

Question: Why not visit all civic associations? Skew comments to some groups. Not including them is not equitable. To discount those who are engaged, feeling left out, is unfair.

Susan Response: The County can do both. There are topics such as transportation projects in which county staff members visit each civic association. There has been a push to see if a different way would enable access. They have hosted open houses to try and leverage resources county tax dollars fund.

Bill Richardson – wrap up.

Susan Cunningham shared that on 8 March she is hosting a Budget Chat at Women’s Club at 3pm. The location is South Buchanan Street.