

A Year in Review



COVID-19 response captured national headlines for the year and changed the way we all live and work. On March 13, County Manager Mark Schwartz signed a Declaration of Local Emergency in response to the “growing occurrences of COVID-19” and its threat to public health. Immediately, departments pivoted to new service delivery models. Programs embraced new platforms and innovations, employees adapted to working remotely, and the County leveraged its partnerships with the nonprofit and business communities and other Arlington based organizations to address challenges.

The Department of Public Safety Communications and Emergency Management (DPSCEM) embraced innovation in order to provide critical mission services and programs to the community, and to sustain the efforts underway. These activities were critical in the last year to ensure DPSCEM staff would be able to continue the business of government and be well positioned post-pandemic. While (Fiscal Year) FY 2022 guarantees continued focus on COVID-19, including vaccine distribution and testing site operations, many of our staff will turn their attention to steady-state objectives. Below are a just a few highlights of the great work DPSCEM staff has completed over the past year to maintain service to the public, as well as planned activities for the upcoming year.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

- DPSCEM established a virtual EOC and logistics function to respond to the ongoing pandemic.
- Emergency operations supported planned and unplanned events such as the election, Million Maga March, the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol, and the inauguration.
- In FY 2022, will continue to assist with testing and vaccine distribution operations and to support planned events.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT

- In July 2020, the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) expanded its capability to handle emergency (9-1-1) and non-emergency calls from any remote location. This significant achievement has enhanced the ECC’s ability to sustain delivery of critical services despite significant events, incidents, or conditions.
- 12 Emergency Communications Technicians now can handle calls from their homes with access to the same technologies and capabilities in the center itself. The ECC is leading the nation in its implementation of remote dispatch capabilities.
- In FY 2022, the ECC will continue to focus on regional leadership in the cross jurisdictional effort of interoperability for different systems, including radio and Computer Aided Dispatch. Through this coordination the ECC can optimize equipment and coordination within the region.

PREPAREDNESS EFFORTS

- County staff worked with the National Weather Service (NWS) to renew the Arlington’s Storm Ready status originally granted in 2010. This helps Arlington County prepare for all weather events.
- In FY 2022, staff will work on revisions of the County’s Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), incorporating lessons learned from the pandemic response, and deploying those to various training and exercise events.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Staff re-developed ways of engagement for the post-pandemic world, focusing less on in person education events, and more on social media campaigns. Limited public engagement events now are focused on health equity to underserved populations.
- In FY 2022, staff will focus on embedding an equity approach in all work, as well work towards the Creation of an Access and Function Needs advisory group to assist in developing engagement opportunities and to collaborate with our partners to better serve communities who are most likely to be adversely impacted by an emergent event.

RE-ORGANIZATION AND ANALYSIS

- Implemented a re-organization to find efficiencies within department structure and prepare for the organization’s future going forward.
- In FY 2022, staff will continue to develop comprehensive knowledge management plans and use data analytics to inform management and operational decisions.