

*Essential Guide to  
Arlington County's*

# Comprehensive Plan

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*This guide was prepared by the Planning Division of the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development with the help of supporting County agencies. The Planning Division is responsible for the overall coordination and review of the Comprehensive Plan. Several agencies within Arlington County are responsible for the preparation and review of specific elements.*

*For more information about the Comprehensive Plan, visit the County's website at [arlingtonva.us](http://arlingtonva.us) and search "comprehensive plan."*

# County Vision



*Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban 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.*



**Thanks to a history of forward-looking decisions rooted in smart growth, Arlington has enjoyed remarkable achievements.**

A community-based vision helped Arlington protect low density residential neighborhood areas, while planning for the expansion of Metro in the 1970's. This was a pivotal point in forming the compact, urban environment we know today.

With an exceptional transportation network and one of the best school systems in the country, the walkable neighborhoods are inviting to a diverse population.

Its distinguished school system is augmented by a dozen colleges and universities. Staying after graduation is also enticing - *USA Today* ranked Arlington as a #1 post-college town. Millennials are currently the largest cohort. The smart, creative workforce is attractive to businesses and contributes to Arlington maintaining one of the

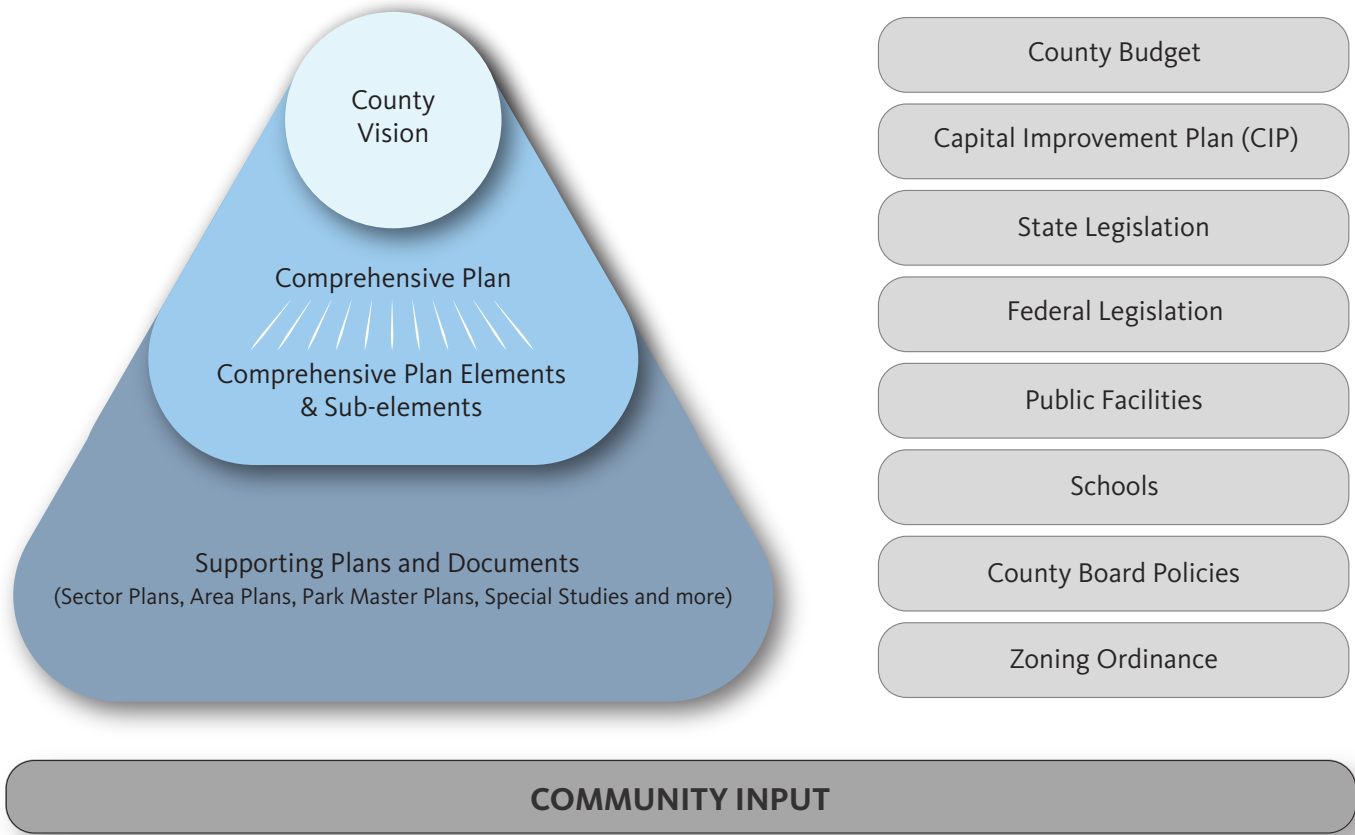
lowest unemployment rates in Virginia, and the lowest in the region. The Arlington job market is forecasted to grow to 290,800 jobs by 2045.

The County's exceptional financial management practices help provide high levels of services and benefits to taxpayers. A consistent Triple-AAA bond rating lowers bond interest rates and maximizes the use of every public dollar.

In addition, the County invests in a wide range of community facilities and programs, including award-winning programs, such as the affordable housing program, Arlington County Commuter Services (ACCS), Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy, public art, parks and more.

Furthermore, Arlington County is nationally recognized for its park and recreation system, ranking third of the 100 largest cities in the nation on the Trust for Public Lands ParkScore in 2022.

# How Does the Comprehensive Plan Influence Priorities?



## **Arlington's vision is at the core of all County planning and development.**

The County's first Comprehensive Plan was established on August 27, 1960, and included five elements. The document has been amended over time and now includes 11 elements, two of which include multiple sub-elements. Through these elements and sub-elements, the Comprehensive Plan aims to ensure that Arlington remains a safe, healthy, convenient and prosperous community and an attractive place in which to live, work and play.

The Comprehensive Plan is supported by a series of sector, area and revitalization plans, as well as other plans and policy documents. These planning documents build on such Comprehensive Plan topics as land use, public spaces, street design, affordable housing, historic preservation, and community services, providing additional guidance and recommendations.

The Comprehensive Plan guides the coordinated and harmonious development of the County and serves as a decision-making tool for the County Board, Advisory Commissions, and County Departments. Comprehensive Plan goals and recommendations are considered when adopting the County's annual budget and Capital Improvement Program, although the process of establishing priorities is also influenced by County Board guidance, community feedback, emerging or evolving opportunities or challenges, as well as state and federal legislation. Each year, as public and private development projects come forward for review and approval, there may be times when the County Board must consider, balance, and prioritize multiple Comprehensive Plan goals.

# Comprehensive Plan Review Process & Public Engagement

**Arlington values community-based planning, where open and transparent processes are used in tandem with robust community engagement.**

The Code of Virginia requires all governing bodies in the Commonwealth to have an adopted Comprehensive Plan, and for the local planning commission to review the plan at least once every five years. Since its original adoption, Arlington's Comprehensive Plan has been periodically updated and expanded.

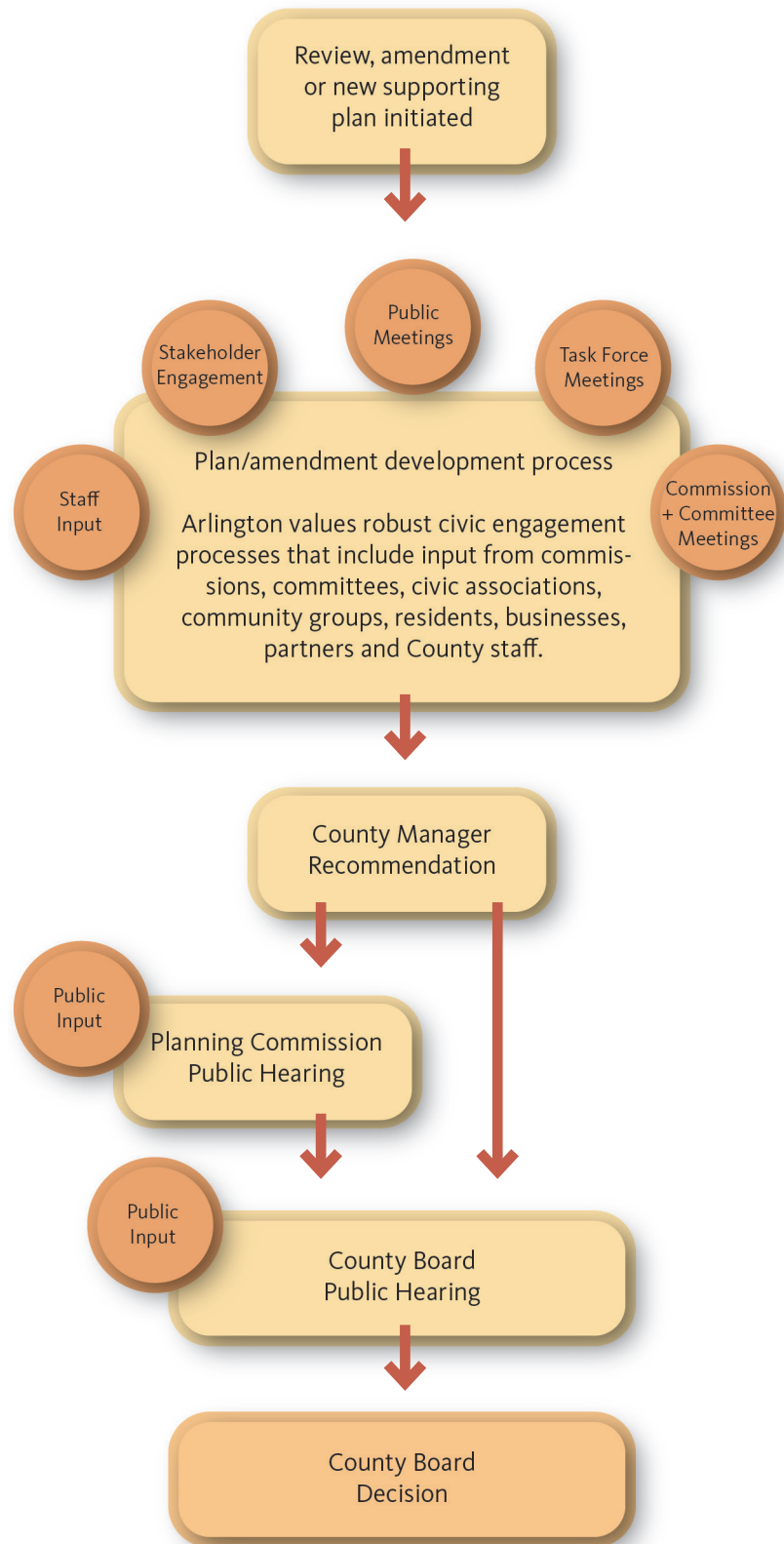
The County's Comprehensive Plan is reviewed and updated on an ongoing (or continual) basis. Every five years, the County produces a Five-Year Review Report on Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. The development of this report highlights changes made over the past five years and helps the County Board determine whether any changes are needed to plan elements. Elements typically contain goals, objectives, policies, strategies, and recommendations pertaining to a specific policy area that impacts the present and future development of the County.

Elements are typically developed and amended through a community-based process that includes the evaluation of existing policies, the development of alternatives, and consideration of recommendations. Input is collected and evaluated by County staff in cooperation with commissions, committees, task forces, community groups and organizations, neighborhood civic associations and local businesses as well as other partners. County staff use this stakeholder input to finalize a proposed plan or amendment that becomes the County Manager's recommendation.

A Planning Commission public hearing is held to review the County Manager's recommendations and hear public testimony. The commission considers all input and makes a recommendation to the County Board.

The County Board receives the County Manager's recommendations and Planning Commission recommendations and hears additional public testimony before ultimately making a final decision.

The same review process is generally followed for the development of supporting documents, such as sector, area, small area, and revitalization plans. The specifics of each process, including which commissions and stakeholders play a role, will vary.



*A typical process follows a combination of the steps outlined here, however each process can vary, depending on a number of considerations.*

# How Do Public Facilities and Schools Fit In?

While the County Board oversees the daily operation and strategic development of most essential government services, a separate and independent School Board guides the growth and evolution of Arlington Public Schools (APS). As APS and the County share fiscal resources, the County Board and the School work together to identify, plan for, and address public facility needs in Arlington. To help navigate these conversations, Board members and stakeholders rely on the findings and guidance provided in the 2015 Community Facilities Study and the APS Strategic Plan.

## **Public Facilities**

The [Community Facilities Study](#) was a collaborative effort between the County, APS, and the broader Arlington community to identify needs for additional schools (and additional student capacity at existing schools), fire stations, vehicle storage sites and other community-serving facilities over the next five, 10 and 20 years, and to develop a strategic framework to implement priority projects. Two advisory commissions support ongoing discussions on public facility needs: The Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) and, formed as an outgrowth of the Community Facilities Study, the Joint Facilities Advisory Commission (JFAC).

## **Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC)**

The mission of the [Public Facilities Review Committee](#) is to ensure that civic infrastructure projects reflect the highest quality in land use and transportation planning and architectural design. PFRC members are appointed by the Arlington County Board.

## **Joint Facilities Advisory Commission (JFAC)**

The mission of the [Joint Facilities Advisory Commission](#) is to provide input to both the County Board and the School Board regarding capital facility needs assessments, capital improvement plans, and long range facility planning.





### **Public Schools**

Relying on staff and community engagement, the School Board adopted a [Strategic Plan](#) for the 2022-2028 school years to identify opportunities for school system improvement. The School Board and public receive annual progress reports on Strategic Plan goals. These reports provide a forum to consider whether modifications to the Strategic Plan may be warranted.

The current Strategic Plan focuses on five important goal areas:

- 1: Student Success
- 2: Student Well-Being
- 3: Engaged Workforce
- 4: Operational Excellence
- 5: Partnerships

### **Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)**

Both the County and APS integrate priority projects into their respective 10-year Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) which are adopted on a biennial basis. The [County's CIPs](#) outlines immediate and emerging capital projects and funding needs and priorities. Similarly, the [APS CIP](#) addresses future facility needs identified in the Arlington Facilities and Student Accommodation Plan (AFSAP), including construction and major maintenance projects. The CIPs are the end result of significant planning processes that must establish priorities for balancing and allocating funding between longer-term strategic needs and ongoing maintenance and existing infrastructure needs.

# Comprehensive Plan Goals & Objectives

The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide the coordinated and harmonious development of the County through the provision of high standards of public services and facilities. To achieve this, the 11 plan elements and their sub-elements work together across a set of overarching principles. Below, the Comprehensive Plan elements are cross-referenced with the principles they help implement.

The principles below were included in the County Board Resolution concerning the Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the County Board in 1960.

	Master Transportation Plan	Historic Preservation Master Plan	Affordable Housing Master Plan	Sanitary Sewer System Master Plan	Recycling Program Master Plan	Public Spaces Master Plan	Community Energy Plan	Water Distribution Master Plan	Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan	Stormwater Master Plan	General Land Use Plan
Retention of the predominantly residential character of the County, and limitation of intense development to limited and defined areas	●	●	●					●			●
Promotion of sound business, commercial and light industrial activities in designated areas appropriately related to residential neighborhoods	●										●
Development of governmental facilities which will promote efficiency of operation and optimum public safety and service, including the areas of health, welfare, culture and recreation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Provision of an adequate supply of water effectively distributed							●				
Maintenance of sewage disposal standards acceptable to the immediate County area and its neighbors in the entire Washington Metropolitan Area and consistent with the program of pollution abatement of the Potomac River				●							
Provision of an adequate storm water drainage system					●	●		●	●		
Provision of an adequate system of traffic routes which is designed to form an integral part of the highway and transportation system of the County and region, assuring a safe, convenient flow of traffic, thereby facilitating economic and social interchange in the County	●					●					●



# Elements of the Comprehensive Plan



# General Land Use Plan



The American Planning Association awarded Arlington's General Land Use Plan a 2017 National Planning Achievement Award, the profession's highest honor.

## *Purpose*

The General Land Use Plan is the primary guide for future development in the County. The plan establishes the overall character, extent and location of various uses and serves as the guide for decision-making related to future development.

## *Goals*

- Concentrate high-density development within Metro Station Areas in the Rosslyn-Ballston and Route 1/Richmond Highway Metrorail Transit Corridors.
- Promote mixed-use development in Metro Station Areas
- Increase the supply of housing by encouraging construction of a variety of housing types and prices at a range of heights and densities in and near Metro Station Areas.

## *History*

The first General Land Use Plan was adopted in 1961. Since then, the plan has been updated and amended many times to more clearly reflect the intended use for a particular area and to reflect changes resulting from adopted sector, area and revitalization plans.

Reprintings to reflect revisions to the Plan have taken place in 1964, 1966, 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1996, 2011, and 2020.

## *Implementation*

The plan is overseen by the Planning Division of the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development.

Tools used to implement the General Land Use Plan include the Zoning Ordinance and Map, special exception processes, the Subdivision Ordinance, the Capital Improvement Plan, development guidelines, and the Form Based Code in select areas.





## Public Spaces Master Plan

### Purpose

The Public Spaces Master Plan identifies the major public space needs of the community, including parks, natural resources and recreational needs that make up the public space system. The plan includes three sub-elements: Urban Forest Master Plan, Public Art Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan.

### Goals

- *Public Spaces Master Plan*: provide the foundation for a well-integrated network of public spaces that can meet the needs of the growing community.
- *Urban Forest Master Plan*: conserve and enhance our community's tree canopy.
- *Natural Resources Management Plan*: preserve and improve public natural land.
- *Public Art Master Plan*: outline a strategy for how public art will improve the quality of public spaces and the built environment in Arlington for civic placemaking.

### History

The Open Space Master Plan was adopted in September 1994. The Public Spaces Master Plan replaced the Open Space Master Plan in December 2005.

Sub-elements of the Public Spaces Master Plan include the Urban Forest Master Plan (adopted in 2004); The Public Art Master Plan (adopted in 2004); and the Natural Resources Management Plan (adopted in 2010).

### Implementation

The Public Spaces Master Plan along with the Urban Forest Master Plan and the Natural Resources Management Plan are overseen by the Department of Parks and Recreation. The Public Art Master Plan is overseen by the Cultural Affairs Division of Arlington Economic Development. The Urban Forest Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan are currently undergoing a combined update and the new Forestry and Natural Resources Plan will be a separate element of the Comprehensive Plan, with adoption anticipated in early 2023.

#### Plan Sub-Elements:

- *Natural Resources Management Plan (2010)*
- *Public Art Master Plan (2004, updated 2021)*
- *Urban Forest Master Plan (2004)*



# Master Transportation Plan



## Plan Sub-Elements:

- *Bicycle Element (2019)*
- *Demand and System Management Element (adopted in 2008)*
- *Goals and Policies Summary (2017)*
- *MTP Map (2019)*
- *Parking and Curb Space Management Element (adopted in 2009)*
- *Pedestrian Element (2011)*
- *Streets Element (amended in 2016)*
- *Transit Element (updated in 2016)*



## Purpose

The Master Transportation Plan (MTP) provides the overall rationale for developing transit networks, roads, walkways, bikeways and other facilities to meet travel needs. Its purpose is to guide those who make or explain decisions that affect the transportation network, describe the rationale, and assist stakeholders who choose to advocate for better transportation policy. Plan elements include a goals and policy document, the MTP Map, and six modal elements with more detailed information.

## Goals

- Provide high-quality transportation services
- Move more people without more traffic
- Promote safety
- Establish equity
- Manage effectively and efficiently
- Advance environmental sustainability

## History

Arlington's original transportation plan was adopted in 1941. The plan was subsequently updated and several sub-elements were added between 1960 and 1997. In 2004, the County Board directed the Transportation Commission and County staff to undertake a comprehensive update. Plan sub-elements were adopted between 2007 and 2011, with additional updates in 2016, 2017, and 2019.

## Implementation

The MTP is overseen by the Transportation Division of the Department of Environmental Services.



## Purpose

The Water Distribution System Master Plan guides the operation, maintenance and expansion of the County water system. The plan evaluates the ability of the existing infrastructure to meet the anticipated growth, developments and to otherwise provide and maintain adequate water supply and high water quality.

## Goals

- Provide and maintain a safe and reliable drinking water system
- Minimize overall water system average age
- Reduce number of water main breaks
- Provide sufficient and required fire-flow to all areas
- Enhance redundancy to mitigate impacts from a temporary outages
- Maintain regulatory compliance and follow industry standards
- Meet current and anticipated growth demand needs

## History

The Water Distribution Master Plan was initially developed in the 1950's. The plan has been updated and revised since with the latest update in 2014. Arlington's water system was incorporated in 1927.

## Implementation

The plan is overseen by the Water, Sewers, Streets Bureau of the Department of Environmental Services.



### Did you know?

The County's average water consumption in 2021 was **20,180,000 gallons** per day.

# Affordable Housing Master Plan



## Did you know?

Housing is considered affordable if rent or mortgage, plus utilities, equals no more than **30%** of a household's gross income.

## Purpose

The Affordable Housing Master Plan defines the County's affordable housing policy and enables Arlington to respond to the current and future housing needs of residents. The plan includes the context for affordable housing in Arlington, an analysis of current and future housing needs, and the affordable housing policy.

## Goals

- Create an adequate supply of housing to meet current and future community needs
- Ensure that all segments of the community have access to housing
- Ensure that housing efforts contribute to a sustainable community

## History

Affordable Housing Goals were adopted by the County Board in 2000 and Affordable Housing Targets were later adopted in 2003. The goals and targets for affordable housing were subsequently incorporated into the General Land Use Plan.

Arlington adopted its first Affordable Housing Master Plan in 2015 following a three-year community process.

## Implementation

The plan is overseen by the Housing Division of the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development.

Two documents accompany the master plan: the Affordable Housing Implementation Plan and the Affordable Housing Monitoring and Reporting Plan. These documents provide the framework to develop tools to meet housing needs and define indicators that monitor progress towards achieving housing goals.





## Purpose

The Stormwater Master Plan contains information on the condition of the County's stormwater management systems, streams and watersheds in addition to recommendations for improvements. The plan includes information on the capacity of the storm sewer system and recommended projects to reduce the risk of flooding. It provides guidance to help manage stormwater, reduce urban sources of pollution, protect County streams and watersheds and improve the health of the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay.

## Goals

- Reduce potential stormwater threats to public health, safety, and property
- Reduce the impacts of existing urban development and redevelopment on Arlington streams, the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay
- Comply with state and federal regulations for stormwater, water quality and floodplain management
- Comply with ordinances for stormwater detention, Chesapeake Bay preservation, erosion and sediment control and floodplain management.

## History

The Storm Sewer Plan was originally adopted in 1957. In 1975, Water Resources Engineers, Inc. prepared the Four Mile Run Watershed Runoff Control Program Hydrology Report. A Storm Water Master Plan was adopted in 1996 and a Watershed Management Plan in 2001. The two plans were updated and combined into one plan in 2014.

## Implementation

The plan is overseen by the Department of Environmental Services; Office of Sustainability and Environmental Management.

### Did you know?

There are  
**373 miles**  
of storm sewers in  
Arlington.





## Community Energy Plan



### *Purpose*

The Community Energy Plan establishes a framework to transition how we generate, distribute, use and store energy. The plan defines energy goals and describes the energy policies needed for a sustainable community over the next thirty years.

### *Goals*

- Increase the energy and operational efficiency of all buildings
- Increase locally generated energy supply using renewable energy options
- Refine and expand transportation infrastructure and operations enhancements
- Integrate CEP goals into all County Government activities
- Ensure Arlington's energy resilience
- Advocate and support personal action through behavior changes and effective education

### *History*

The Community Energy Plan was first adopted in 2013 and updated in 2019.

### *Implementation*

The plan is overseen by the Department of Environmental Services; Office of Sustainability and Environmental Management.

Accompanying the plan is the Community Energy Plan Implementation Framework, which lays out strategies and tools to meet energy goals. The County works with stakeholders to ensure that implementation improves Arlington's economic competitiveness, energy security and environmental commitment, while taking into account energy equity.







## Purpose

The Sanitary Sewer System Master Plan evaluates the system facilities, practices, programs, policies and improvements needed to provide and maintain adequate service into the future.

## Goals

- Anticipate future demands on the sanitary sewer system
- Project appropriate expansion to meet those demands
- Outline the maintenance programs necessary to ensure continuous service
- Outline improvements that enhance the efficiency of operation and improve the reliability of service
- Ensure that Arlington County remains in compliance with regulatory requirements

## History

In 1961, the County Board adopted the Master Plan for Sanitary Sewerage System. The plan was updated and renamed Sanitary Sewer System Master Plan in 1970, 1992 and 2002.

## Implementation

The plan is overseen by the Water, Sewers, Streets Bureau of the Department of Environmental Services.



### Did you know?

In 1933,  
**35 miles**  
of sanitary pipes emptied  
directly into streams. Today,  
**465 miles**  
of pipe collect  
sewage to be treated.

# Recycling Program Implementation Plan



## Did you know?

The County's Zero Waste Resolution aims to divert **90% of waste** from incineration and landfills by 2038.



## Purpose

The Recycling Program Implementation Plan provides a guide for the development of effective recycling programs in Arlington. Virginia Code requires jurisdictions to identify the location of recycling facilities as an element of the Comprehensive Plan.

## Goals

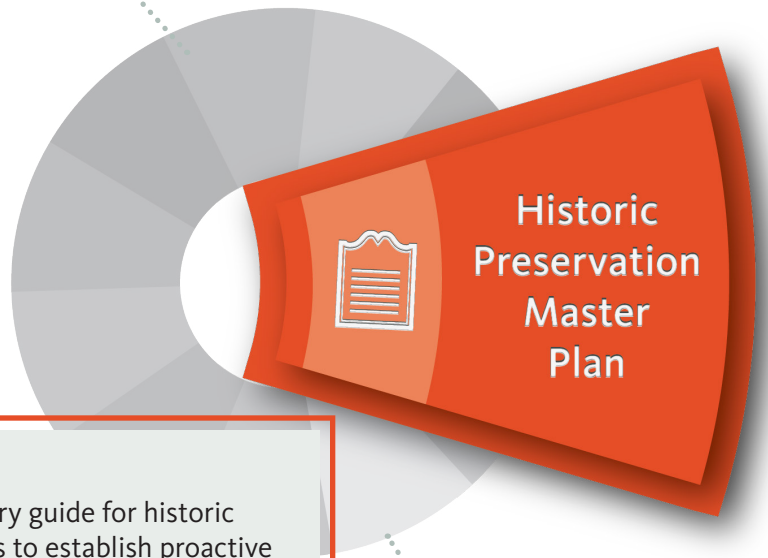
- Provide major recommendations related to the implementation of recyclable collection, processing, diversion and environmental issues, including program budget and scheduling.
- Guide promotional and educational strategies for public education, publicity, incentives, mandates and material bans.
- Identify and map recycling center locations.

## History

The Recycling Program Implementation Plan was created in 1990. The Recycling Centers Map was first printed in 1995, with updated versions printed in 2008 and 2016.

## Implementation

The plan is overseen by the Department of Environmental Services; Solid Waste Bureau. The Solid Waste Management Plan was developed in 1991 in response to state mandates and replaced the County's Recycling Program Implementation Plan as the guide for solid waste programs. The current [Solid Waste Management Plan](#) was adopted in 2004. The County is currently developing the new Solid Waste Management Plan for 2024, which will incorporate zero-waste principles into the County's waste management goals and actions.



## *Purpose*

The Historic Preservation Master Plan is the primary guide for historic resources in the County. The purpose of this plan is to establish proactive priorities, goals and objectives for County historic preservation activities that involve the historic built environment and County history in general.

## *Goals*

- Enhance understanding of Arlington’s history and historic character
- Better integrate preservation values into County planning, land use and other policies and practices
- Protect historic neighborhoods, corridors, commercial centers and civic buildings

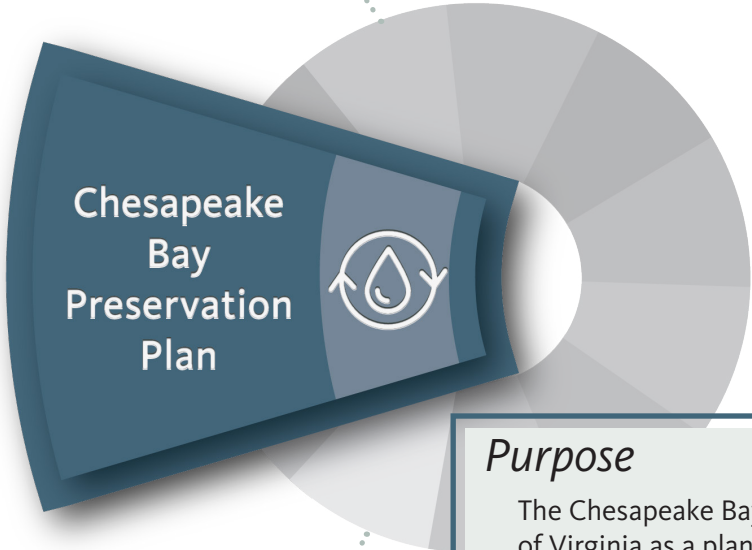
## *History*

The County Board adopted the Historic Preservation Master Plan in 2006 and is in the process of being updated in 2023.

## *Implementation*

The plan is overseen by the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development; Neighborhood Services Division.





### *Purpose*

The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan is required by the Commonwealth of Virginia as a planning and policy implementation framework for the County's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. The Ordinance designates Resource Protection Area buffers adjacent to streams and wetlands to protect water quality.

### *Goals*

- Identify and characterize the County's water resources and examine the extent to which they have been affected by urban land activities
- Map actions that Arlington County can take to help preserve and restore local streams, the Potomac River, and the Chesapeake Bay
- Meet the Comprehensive Plan requirements of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Designation and Management Regulations.

### *History*

The Virginia General Assembly enacted the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act in 1988 and management regulations in 1989. As a result, each tidewater local government was required to implement an ordinance that establishes criteria to minimize or reduce pollution during development and redevelopment. Arlington adopted the original Ordinance in 1992. The Preservation Plan was adopted in 2001. The Ordinance was updated in 2003 and 2014. An updated Resource Protection Area Map was approved in July 2017.

### *Implementation*

The Ordinance and Plan are overseen by the Department of Environmental Services; Office of Sustainability and Environmental Management.

***Did you know?***  
Arlington has  
**1,439**  
properties with a  
Resource Protection  
Area.



# Resources For More Information

More detailed information on the topics covered in this guide are available on the County website, [arlingtonva.us](http://arlingtonva.us).

## Comprehensive Plan

- [Comprehensive Plan](#)
- [Five-Year Review: 2015/16](#)
- [Technical Resource](#)

## Plan Elements

- [Affordable Housing Master Plan](#)
- [Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan and Update](#)
- [Community Energy Plan](#)
- [General Land Use Plan](#)
- [Historic Preservation Master Plan](#)
- [Master Transportation Plan](#)
- [Public Spaces Master Plan](#)
  - [Urban Forest Master Plan](#)
  - [Public Art Master Plan](#)
  - [Natural Resources Management Plan](#)
- [Recycling Program Implementation Plan](#)
- [Sanitary Sewer System Master Plan](#)
- [Stormwater Master Plan](#)
- [Water Distribution Master Plan](#)

## Other Plans & Studies

- [Land Use & Urban Design Planning](#)
- [Capital Improvement Plan](#)
- [Environmental Planning](#)
- [Solid Waste Management Plan](#)
- [Parks & Open Space Planning](#)
- [Transportation Planning](#)
- [Water & Utilities Planning](#)

## Budget & Finance

- [About the Budget](#)
- [Adopted Budget](#)

## Civic Engagement

- [A-Z Directory of Services](#)
- [Engage Arlington](#)
- [Arlington Civic and Citizen Associations](#)
- [Community & Service Organizations](#)
- [Condo, Homeowner & Tenant Associations](#)

## Elected Officials

- [Arlington County Board](#)
- [Arlington Public Schools Board](#)

## Related County Commissions and Advisory Groups

- [Planning Commission](#)
- [Transportation Commission](#)
- [Housing Commission](#)
- [Parks & Recreation Commission](#)
- [Public Facilities Review Committee](#)
- [Sports Commission](#)
- [Climate, Change, Energy and Environment Commission](#)
- [Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board](#)
- [Joint Facilities Advisory Commission](#)
- [Forestry and Natural Resources Commission](#)
- [Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group](#)
- [Arlington Commission for the Arts](#)
- [Chesapeake Bay Ordinance Review Committee](#)
- [Other Advisory Groups & Commissions](#)





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<https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Plans-Studies/Comprehensive-Plan>