

OPEN GOVERNMENT, TRANSPARENCY, AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

One of my strategic priorities continues to focus on Open Government, Transparency and Quality Services. Our goal is to increase citizen satisfaction and promote positive experiences with Arlington County government by making it faster and easier for residents and businesses to complete transactions and receive quality services. Effective customer service and engagement processes play an important role in building public trust, increase transparency, and make working with the government an easier and more gratifying experience.

The County is making progress in advancing Open Government – moving towards greater transparency and easier access to information. We are learning along the way and balancing the demand in this important area with our available County resources. I want to highlight a series of initiatives that we will help us advance our journey across four key areas: (1) Simplifying access to Information and Data; (2) Streamlining Government Processes; (3) Enhancing Customer Services; and (4) Advancing Public Engagement Processes.

Simplifying Access to Information and Data

We recognize the importance of making data more accessible, offering easier options for finding information easily without the need for submitting formal inquiries or requests. Data sharing is an important tool for leveraging public information and gaining insights to inform public policy. We are taking initial steps to understand how data is used, how it is interpreted, and the context for data.

- **Open Data Advisory Group** - Last year, I appointed a new Open Data Advisory Group (ODAG) to help identify and prioritize datasets for the County. The ODAG is comprised of residents, business owners, open data partners such as the Sunlight Foundation and Code for America, and members of several County commissions. The ODAG will continue to provide recommendations on strategies to improve open data and transparency.
- **Open Data Portal** - The Arlington [Open Data Portal](#) now offers 185 different datasets, with more being added each month, such as the Park Facility Reservations made live in January 2018. I recently directed every Department to identify data sets that can be shared with our residents and businesses. In addition, we have an internal staff team working to complete a comprehensive data inventory over this next year.
- **My Arlington App** - We continue to promote the “My Arlington App”, where members of the public can easily view county events and meetings, permits under review, traffic alerts, and other county information. One newest element includes “[My Arlington Projects Map](#)” visualization tool. This map view tool, is intended to make it easier for residents to locate and learn more about County projects taking place around Arlington. It also offers insight to site plan projects which are under review, under construction, approved, or completed. Users can filter projects by type and size, street address or civic association. It also offers an update on our County crews’ daily work.
- **Open Financial Portal** - Over the next year, we are planning an initial launch of an Open Financial Portal. This portal will provide an interactive graphical display of data, including budget and transactional information. It also will provide the ability to “slice and dice” and drill down into the data by department, division, line of business, and more.

- **Freedom of Information Act Requests** - Following our efforts started in 2016, we will continue to post responses to Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests online, to promote increased awareness and transparency of government activities. The Virginia Freedom of Information Act provides citizens of the Commonwealth and representatives of the media access to public records held by public bodies, public officials and public employees. (Note: Personal identifying information of residents and 911 phone call transcripts are not posted online.) I am excited that starting this year we are also using a new FOIA tracking system that offers improved internal data analysis and posting of responsive FOIA documents that do not require redaction.

Streamlining Government Processes

A significant aspect of open government includes making it easier to do business with Government. [One Stop Arlington](#) is an enterprise-wide effort, aimed to make it easier to apply for and process permit applications for large and complex projects with Arlington County.

Customers will ultimately have a one stop option for assistance and case management support for large and complex projects throughout the permit process. Once completed, the public benefits will include the ability for customers to apply online for permits 24/7, submit plans and drawings electronically, schedule inspections, check application status, review staff comments, sign up for email notifications and alerts, make online payments, and access real-time information regarding the status of a permit.

The new system is scheduled to be implemented in two phases. Phase I will support the online submission, review and payment of select permit types, including development project and small business applications (site plans and use permits), civil engineering plans and zoning determinations, among others. This phase also includes an interim solution for online submission, review and payment for land disturbance activities and building permits. Phase I is anticipated to be delivered in FY 2019. Phase II, anticipated to be complete in FY 2020, will support online submission, review and payment of all remaining permit types and applications. Ongoing customer feedback and user experiences will be used to inform the development, design, and implementation phases.

The CPHD Development Fund is funding the design and development of the new permitting system. This year CPHD Development Fund permitting fees are proposed to increase 2.5 percent, tied to the Employment Cost Index. This increase will ensure that the fees keep pace with the cost, salaries, and benefits for employees who process permits and applications. Upon successful delivery of Phase I, the current automation enhancement surcharge on all land development and permit fees is proposed to increase to ten percent (from its current rate of five percent) to ensure that the CPHD Development Fund has sufficient funding to deliver Phase II of the system.

Enhancing Customer Service

- **CARES:** In the past year, we launched the Arlington CARES initiative to provide ongoing improvements to customer service for our residents, businesses, and visitors. Every Arlington County employee is now receiving mandatory CARES training to identify strategies to embrace core elements of customer service: Communication, Awareness, Responsiveness, Empowerment, and Solutions. The CARES team is also reviewing our existing call center operations, public facing phone numbers, and online tools that we hope will yield a better

customer experience. And, in the coming months, we will establish new customer service standards and launch the CARES Customer Service Squad, a quality review initiative to help identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

- **Report a Problem** - One key tool that Arlington County will continue to use and evaluate is "Report a Problem". This online tool provides a portal for residents and businesses to share information about a streetlight outage, pot hole in need of a repair, and other core service needs. Members of the public can also view the requests submitted using a map or list view. This public access tool is an excellent example of residents and government working together to identify needs across our County. Our team continues to identify new opportunities to expand the use of this important customer service strategy.
- **Ombudsman Officers** - Unfortunately, residents and businesses still have challenges with resolving issues or finding information easily. Therefore, we will continue to support our ombudsman program for both residents and businesses. Our *Resident Ombudsman* is available to troubleshoot resident concerns that are not easily resolved and works closely with County leadership and elected officials to break down silos, implement process improvements, and improve customer service to residents. He relies upon a network of staff subject matter experts to accomplish these goals. Similarly, our *Business Ombudswoman* works in partnership with the business community to help resolve issues on a range of topics, improve customer service, and identify improvements to County administrative processes to become the premiere place to do business, and increase Arlington's economic competitiveness in the region and nationwide. Additionally, the Ombudsman serves as an ambassador to strengthen relationships working with the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, Ballston, Crystal City, and Rosslyn Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and other business associations.
- **Consumer Protection** - Over the next year, we will launch a new Consumer Protection Initiative across the County. This will include a dedicated liaison to assist residents if they experience challenges with non-county businesses or service providers. A new central website will be made available to find resources and information about consumer issues, including cable services, taxi, and towing. Information will also be available on accessing state and federal resources for addressing consumer protection issues.

Engage Arlington

After nearly a year of listening to both internal and external stakeholders, the County has developed a [public engagement action plan](#) which includes four key objectives: (1) Build a clear and consistent approach for public engagement; (2) Strengthen communication and trust throughout our project lifecycle; (3) Expand and diversify participation; and (4) Evaluate and enhance policies to advance good community engagement practice. As part of this action plan, we have taken steps to advance the following initiatives and activities:

- **Public Engagement Guide:** The County realized a major milestone in achieving these objectives by finalizing the new *Six Step Public Engagement Guide for Capital Projects* in February 2018. Arlington completes hundreds of capital projects -- large and small -- in any given year. Recognizing there's no one-size-fits-all approach, this guide is intended to help align the appropriate level of public engagement based on characteristics, benefits, and potential impacts. The guide highlights how engagements should be planned, implemented, and assessed depending on the type of capital project being completed -- using a unique

decision matrix, with guiding questions. This should lead to more consistent and effective interactions surrounding county projects. The guide also aims to score successes on all four key objectives, establishing practices to: set clear, consistent, and transparent engagement efforts; communicate early and often throughout the lifecycle of a project; expand and diversify outreach to the full range of impacted stakeholders (including hard to reach); and continuously assess and improve implementation efforts. We have recently started to train staff to use this new tool with anticipation of adopting implementation of the guide for all capital projects by late spring or early summer 2018. The Public Engagement team will ultimately seek out methods to adapt the guide to other types of County efforts, including planning and policy.

- **Board Reports:** Staff has already been tasked with including descriptions of their public engagement efforts as a part of all reports to the County Board. Making engagement a key component of Board reports elevates awareness of the County's commitment to improving its engagement processes while also serving to provide the best possible information to the Board.
- **Integrate Engagement principles into Capital Improvement Process (CIP):** A bedrock assumption of successful public engagement is that raising awareness as early as possible is critical to a successful process. And with capital projects, that means that we have to find new and better ways to engage the community around the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). In preparing for the next CIP process, the County will develop a multi-tiered approach. As the County begins the process of identifying capital projects for consideration for the 2019-2028 period, we will seek early community feedback to help inform the development of this CIP. We will explore the use of data visualization tools to help make the proposed CIP more digestible and accessible, leading to a more informed and engaged community process.
- **Capacity Building for Engagement Practice:** As the County seeks better practices for engaging the community itself, it is also working to build capacity within the community with several other first of their kind events. In March, the County is hosting a series of roundtable discussions between the County Manager, the President of the Civic Federation, and the Presidents of Arlington's Civic and Condo Associations. These events offer a unique opportunity to explore opportunities and strategies for improving communication and coordination between these organizations. Similarly, the County is exploring other options to help civic associations and others with tools and strategies to improve communication and engagement with neighbors. Our team is also working with the County Board to explore training opportunities for targeted commission chairs to fortify the skills of these public partners in their vital work.

In developing these and other new tools to provide a consistent approach to public engagement across departments and a common set of game rules for public participation, the County is working to create avenues for greater public involvement and ultimately, more impactful and effective community processes.