



THE Civic Voice

ARLINGTON COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION

Newsletter of the Arlington County Civic Federation

Volume 101, Issue 3 November 2016

November Events

Stefanie Pryor

Our main presentation November 1 will be on short-term rental zoning changes. Due to the pending legislation in Richmond, Arlington County has an accelerated schedule with County Board vote in December.

In 2016, the Virginia General Assembly considered legislation which will preclude local governments from enforcing local zoning laws restricting the establishment of short-term residential rentals in any zoning district where residential uses are permitted. It also restricted local governments from collecting and auditing Transient Occupancy Taxes, as they would for any other lodging property. A version of the legislation passed in the 2016 session, but the Governor referred it to the Virginia Housing Commission to study and create draft legislation for consideration in the 2017 session.

The topic is extremely complicated:

- zoning districts for short-term residential rentals
- owner occupancy and primary residence requirement
- parking space requirements
- area of dwelling unit allowed
- application and permit requirements
- short-term residential rentals in accessory dwellings
- maximum number of short-term rentals in each multi-family building
- maximum number of guests

Refer to [Arlington County site](#) for full listing of meetings and materials. Sign up for the Arlington County notices via that page to receive the latest information.

We also have presentations on predatory towing and an introduction of the legislative committee resolution on medical marijuana legalization. Vote on the resolution will occur at our December meeting to meet the pending Richmond session in January.

November 8 — you should need no further explanation. Just in case, see the [Arlington County elections site](#) for additional information on the proposed amendments to the Constitution of Virginia, County Bond Referenda, and links to the candidates' websites.

GENERAL MEETING NOTICE

Tuesday, November 1, 2016

7:00 p.m. (NEW TIME)

Hazel Auditorium
Virginia Hospital Center
1701 N George Mason Drive
Arlington VA 22205

Agenda

- 7:00 Meeting called to order
- 7:10 Short-Term Rental Zoning Changes
- 8:10 Predatory Towing
- 8:30 Medical Marijuana Resolution
- 8:50 Unfinished Business and Announcements
- 8:55 New Business
- 9:00 Adjourn

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Predatory Towing Practices

Sarah McKinley

For years my civic association has complained about predatory towing practices in Arlington and the negative impacts it has on individual citizens as well as small businesses. A couple of years ago I saw it in action at the Westmont Shopping Center at the corner of Glebe Road and Columbia Pike. The towing truck was “hiding out” at the Exxon station across the street, with the driver and his binoculars trained on the shoppers in Westmont. At the point that any of those unfortunate people took one step off of the Westmont property, the tow truck would swoop in to hook it up and haul it away. Even those who were legitimately shopping at Westmont could be targeted if they weren’t aware of the rules.

If the owner came back while his/her car was still there, they could pay \$25 as a “drop fee” to get their vehicle released before it was towed. Otherwise they would have to find a way to get to the tow yard, up to 3 miles away, to pay a fee of \$130-\$170 to get it back.

The result? Many shoppers, faced with this experience, will never return to that parking lot, to the detriment of the small businesses that inhabit that area.

This November the County Board is reviewing its County Ordinance on Trespass Towing. Our civic association is asking the County to consider changes to the ordinance that will protect consumer interests. We welcome you to read our letter to the County Board, and consider adding your name to a petition to make three changes to the rules. These include requiring the towing company to get a second signature from an on-site business operator before towing a vehicle, calling the police with information on the vehicle before they tow it, and taking pictures of the vehicle from all four sides before hooking it up. Please visit: <http://columbiaheightsva.org/>

ARLINGTON COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION

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Arlington, VA 22204
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Executive Committee

Jesse Boeding

The Executive Committee met on Sunday, October 9, 2016 to plan the agenda for November 1, 2016 general meeting and discuss future meetings.

The Executive Committee will meet on Sunday, November 6, 2016, at 6:30 p.m. at 4805 Wilson Blvd, Arlington VA 22203 (Fire Station 2).

The deadline for newsletter articles is Thursday, November 24, 2016 due to the meeting date of Tuesday, December 6. Newsletters are published approximately 1 week before the meeting.

Remembrances: Ruth Kanter

Ruth Kanter a longtime activist and alternate delegate to the Civic Federation passed away on May 11, 2016 after a 13 year illness. Join the Kanter family in celebrating Ruth's life on Friday, November 18, 2016 at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, 4444 Arlington Blvd., gathering at 6 pm for the celebration that will begin at 6:45.

RSVPs and shared remembrances can be sent to RuthFKanter@gmail.com. Donations in Ruth's honor can be made to the [Parkinson's Foundation National Capital Area](#)

Why a Resolution for the General Assembly?

Andy Ludwig

While most of the country has been swept up in the tide of relaxing laws relating to marijuana (1), Virginia – and Arlington in particular – has bucked the trend(2).

Arlington has seen arrests for marijuana possession INCREASE 80+% in the past 4 years (3) -- the highest of any city in Virginia – wrecking the lives & future of 500+ Arlingtonians each year. This costs residents roughly \$2M in tax payer money(4), and draws resources from policing, prosecuting and punishing much more severe crimes, where an external party is actually affected.

The worst part is that we know prohibition doesn't work. And minorities are suffering the worst – eight times more likely to be arrested for simple possession (5). Even though 86% of Virginians would like access to medical marijuana(6), to treat chronic pain, seizures, sleep difficulties, Alzheimer's, diabetes, cancer, PTSD, and much more (7) – Virginia has some of the harshest criminal penalties in the country for possessing something that is objectively safer than **legal** alcohol or tobacco (8).

Even the federal government's National Cancer Institute recognizes cannabis for what it is – a medicine. While it's legal to grow in DC (but not sell), some states are taxing & regulating it, offering relief to millions, and generating enough tax revenue for a new school each year (9).

Perhaps most importantly, those states are not wrecking the lives of 500+ residents (and their families) each year – especially returning veterans, who find cannabis to be the best treatment for their PTSD.

Virginians can only change their laws through their lawmakers. Particular members of the General Assembly are not aware of this information, which is certain to sway their viewpoint if they care about the health of their constituents. Please support this resolution so that

Arlington County can help lead the way in promoting a healthier and safer Virginia.

1 HuffingtonPost.com 12/23/15 [The Top 10 Marijuana Policy Victories of 2015](#)

2 WashingtonPost.com 10/28/15 "[Virginia ramps up its war on pot – and the arrests show a disturbing racial divide](#)" Nationally, marijuana possession arrests *decreased* 6.5% while they *increased* 76% in Virginia from 2003 to 2014.

3 "[Racial Disparities in Marijuana Arrests in Virginia \(2003-2013\)](#)." Drug Policy Alliance study by Jon Gettman, Shenandoah University. P. 5 516 Arlington marijuana possession arrests represent an increase of 81% from 2011 to 2013.

4 WashingtonPost.com 10/28/15 "[Virginia ramps up its war on pot – and the arrests show a disturbing racial divide](#)" The ACLU [conservatively estimates](#) Virginia spent \$67M on marijuana enforcement in 2010 for 18,697 arrests. In 2013, 21,684 arrests were made, likely at a cost of \$77.7M (or above, with inflation). Arlington arrests represent 516/21,684 or 2.4% of this figure = \$1.85M

5 3 "[Racial Disparities in Marijuana Arrests in Virginia \(2003-2013\)](#)." Drug Policy Alliance study by Jon Gettman, Shenandoah University, p.5. The arrest ratio for black residents to white residents is 7.8 in Arlington County, despite similar usage rates.

6 Quinnipiac University. Quinnipiac University Poll. 4/4/15. "[With Big Age, Party Gaps, Iowa Voters Split On Marijuana, Quinnipiac University Swing State Poll Finds: Colorado, Virginia Voters Back Recreational Pot](#)" 86% of Virginians support the legal use of marijuana for medical purposes. 54% of Virginians support legalization of marijuana for personal use.

7 National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. Accessed 12/20/15. "[Recent Research on Medical Marijuana](#)." A review of the scientific literature shows marijuana can treat PTSD, epilepsy, Alzheimer's, mS, HIV, diabetes, arthritis and more.

8 Heretohelp : Mental health and substance use information you can trust. Accessed 12/20/15. "[Cannabis, Tobacco and Alcohol Use in Canada](#)" The health costs to the user are eight times higher for drinkers than they are for cannabis users, and 40 times higher for tobacco smokers.

Centers for Disease Controls. FastStats : [Deaths and Mortality](#). Table 10 : Number of Deaths from 113 selected causes... drug-induced causes, alcohol induced causes... (from 2013 data) Accessed 12/20/15. Alcohol-induced deaths : 29,001

DrugWarFacts.Org "[Annual Causes of Death in the United States](#)" Accessed 12/20/15. Using 2010 data: Deaths related to tobacco : "more than 480,000 deaths each year". Deaths related to alcohol : 25,692. Deaths related to prescription drugs : 22,134. Deaths related to cannabis : 0.

9 As cited by Andrew Freedman, Director, Marijuana coordination Office, Office of the Governor, Denver, Colorado at the [Virginia State Bar Annual Conference in Virginia Beach](#) during the "Showcase CLE II: Budding Issues : The Changing Marijuana Landscape", June 19, 2015.

TheCannabist.co "[Colorado's pot tax for schools sets record in May, crushes 2014 totals](#)". 7/13/15. Between January and May of 2015, the Colorado pot tax collected \$13.6 million for school construction projects.

Resolution: Medical Marijuana

Whereas the medical benefits of cannabis, commonly known as marijuana, are well established, to treat such maladies as cancer, Alzheimer's, PTSD, chronic pain, seizures and diabetes (1)

Whereas the US Government has even recognized the medical value of cannabis through the Department of Health's National Cancer Institute (2)

Whereas the majority of US states have adopted "medical marijuana" and/or recreational usage programs without any major catastrophe or public health epidemic (3)

Whereas the vast majority of Virginians support a medical marijuana program (4)

Whereas objectively more addictive, socially damaging drugs like alcohol and tobacco are legal for adults to use (5,6,7)

Whereas Virginia prohibits all forms of usage or possession of this medicine, even when prescribed for medicinal purposes (8)

Be it resolved that the Arlington County Civic Federation urges the General Assembly consider updating the laws related to marijuana :

- Immediately decriminalize the possession and use of cannabis (or "marijuana" as it is commonly known)
- Abolish the unjustifiable use/possession penalties related to drivers licenses
- Direct police agencies to de-prioritize its enforcement and no longer use it as a gateway to otherwise illegal searches of private property
- Compare the existing medical marijuana programs in 25 states & DC for "best practices" in setting up Virginia's medical system.

1. National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. Accessed 12/20/15. "[Recent Research on Medical Marijuana](#)."

2. National Cancer Institute. "[Cannabis and Cannabinoids \(PDQ\)-Patient Version](#)."

3. National Cancer Institute. "[Questions and Answers about Cannabis](#)."

4. Quinnipiac University. Quinnipiac University Poll. 4/4/15. "[With Big Age, Party Gaps, Iowa Voters Split On Marijuana, Quinnipiac University Swing State Poll Finds; Colorado, Virginia Voters Back Recreational Pot](#)"

5. Scientific Reports. 1/30/15. "[Comparative risk assessment of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other illicit drugs using the margin of exposure approach](#)."

6. IFLscience.com. Accessed 9/20/16. "[New Study Finds Marijuana Safer Than Alcohol or Tobacco](#)."

7. Washington Post. 2/23/15. "[Marijuana may be even safer than previously thought, researchers say](#)." Discusses the results of the study mentioned in (5) to a non-scientific audience.

8. NORML.org. Accessed 9/20/16. "[Virginia Laws & Penalties](#)."

Advisory Council on Facilities and Capital Planning (FAC)

Greg Greeley

The Advisory Council on Facilities and Capital Planning (FAC) is a citizen advisory group, appointed by and reporting to the APS School Board. The FAC meets monthly during the school year, typically on the second Monday of the month. Meetings are held at a variety of facilities to help familiarize the members with APS buildings, and interested members of the public are invited to attend. The FAC assists the School Board in the regular review of school facilities and capital improvements by:

- Making recommendations to the School Board on the Arlington Facilities and Student Accommodation Plan (AFSAP) and the 10-year Capital Improvement Plan;
- Assisting the School Board in providing the community with information concerning school facilities and the capital improvement program;
- Receiving and integrating input from the community concerning school facilities and the capital improvement program; and
- Providing an annual review and recommendations concerning school capacities and projected enrollments.

For the current school year, one of the primary topics the FAC will discuss is how APS can plan to create 1300 needed high school seats that will be needed over the next decade.

[Information about the FAC](#)

Is Arlington Angling for Extra Credit?

Roger Morton

Arlington's debt ratio is a tool meant to help the credit rating organizations and prospective investors measure the risk of purchasing the County's general obligation (GO) bonds.

Until 2002, the County standard practice was to calculate its debt ratio as follows: Net tax-supported debt service to **general fund expenditures** should not exceed 10%.

This calculation limited the amount the County could pay to service its debt in a given year—including interest and principal payments—to 10% or less of the total amount of money it spent on all general fund (operating budget) expenditures in that particular year.

On July 19, 2002, the County Board approved a new "Debt Policy" [<https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/cbo/2002/jul/0720/55.PDF>] in which the County's debt ratio was defined as follows:

"The ratio of debt service to **general expenditures** should not exceed 10%, within the 6-year CIP."

The County Board reaffirmed the 2002 debt-ratio calculation in 2008 and 2014, and expanded the CIP window from 6 to 10 years in 2014.

The method used to arrive at the "debt service" numerator in the ratio's calculation has remained unchanged and is not at issue. However, the method for determining the debt ratio's denominator has changed, resulting in an apparent discrepancy in the County's numbers.

In the adopted FY17 general fund budget [<https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2016/06/FY17-Adopted-Budget-All-In-One-compressed.pdf>] on page 521, the County's debt ratio is listed as 8.1%, based on "total debt service as a percentage of general fund expenditures."

County and school debt in FY17 totals \$108 million (\$61.3 plus \$46.7=the numerator), and the general fund expenditures for the period

are \$1,197.7 million (=the denominator). Using these figures yields a debt ratio of 9.0% instead of the 8.1% listed.

To obtain a debt ratio of 8.1% would require that general fund expenditures be nearly \$1,333.3 million. What explains the \$135 million difference (\$1,333.3 minus \$1,197.7)?

The County provides a precise dollar amount for "general fund expenditures" (the pre-2002 denominator) in the FY17 budget document, but it does not provide a dollar amount for "general expenditures" (the post-2002 denominator)—at least not on p. 521. Nor does the budget define those expenditures comprising "general expenditures."

Because the county now uses an undefined (or unpublished) method to arrive at the post-2002 "general expenditures" debt-ratio denominator and it provides no complete list of the precise funds (and corresponding dollar amounts) that would allow readers to calculate it, the County's post-2002 debt-ratio calculation lacks transparency.

This prompts several questions, including 1) Which funds are being added to the post-2002 "general expenditures" ratio denominator that were not included in pre-2002 ratio denominator? 2) Could all of the funds in the larger post-2002 ratio denominator actually be used to repay the debts in the numerator? 3) Why was this change made?

The County's budget document receives an annual award for "Budget Presentation." And yet there is no clear explanation as to how this important calculation is made.

Why should you care? Arlington's debt ratio determines whether we can maintain our AAA bond rating (which reduces our borrowing costs) and how much borrowing capacity we have. The more debt we take on, the more money we must allocate for debt repayment—leaving us with less money in the general fund budget for other spending priorities.

Civic Federation Meetings Schedule and Programs for 2016 - 2017

Meetings are the 1st Tuesday of each month at the NEW TIME of 7 p.m.

November 1: Short-term rental zoning changes, Predatory towing, Legislative Committee Resolution on Medical Marijuana Legalization presentation

Tuesday, November 8: Presidential Elections

December 6: Arlington County Superintendent and Arlington County Manager, Awards Committee Election, Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Committee Accessory Dwellings (AD) Presentation

January 3: County Board

January TBD: Special Saturday meeting for P&Z AD

February 7: P&Z AD Survey Results and Resolution Introduction

March 7: P&Z Resolution Vote

Friday, April 7: Banquet

April 4: Nominating Committee Election

May 2: Legislative Panel (tentative)

June 6: ACCF Elections

June 30/July 1: Fiscal Year Closeout and Officer transition

Arlington County Civic Federation Mission

The ACCF is dedicated to advocacy and community involvement. Its purpose continues to be promoting the general welfare of Arlington County and vicinity in a non-partisan, non-sectarian, non-sectional, and non-political manner.

Committees of the Civic Federation

The committees provide the basis for most actions of the Federation. We strongly encourage every delegate and alternate to serve on at least one committee. If you have an interest in any topic please contact the chair. If a chair is not listed, contact our President Stefanie Pryor at stefanie@civfed.org

Committee	Chair(s)	Email Address
Executive	Jesse Boeding	jesse@civfed.org
Awards	Elected at Dec 2016 Membership Mtg	See listing in newsletter
Audit	Jay Wind	Jay@civfed.org
Bylaws	Sarah Shortall	sarah@civfed.org
Community Relations	Duke Banks	duke.banks@gmail.com
Cultural Affairs	Chair(s) needed	TBD
Emergency	Jackie Snelling	jackie@civfed.org
Environmental Affairs	John Seymour	john@civfed.org
Housing	Chair(s) needed	TBD
Legislation	Acting Chair	Ron Haddox
Membership	Chair needed	membership@civfed.org
911 Scholarships	Chair(s) needed	TBD
Nominating	Elected at April 2017 Membership Mtg	
Parks and Recreation	Michael Thomas	michaelthomas@civfed.org
Planning and Zoning	Martha Moore	martha@civfed.org
Public Services	Jackie Snelling	jackie@civfed.org
Revenues and Expenditures	Chair(s) needed	TBD
Schools	Michael Beer	michaelbeer@civfed.org
Special Events	Joe Pelton	joepelton@civfed.org
Transportation	Jerry Auten	jerry@civfed.org