

Resolution to Restore the Public's Confidence in Arlington County Governance

Sponsored by 4 Past Presidents

Mike McMenamin 2014 – 2015

Stefanie Pryor 2015 – 2017

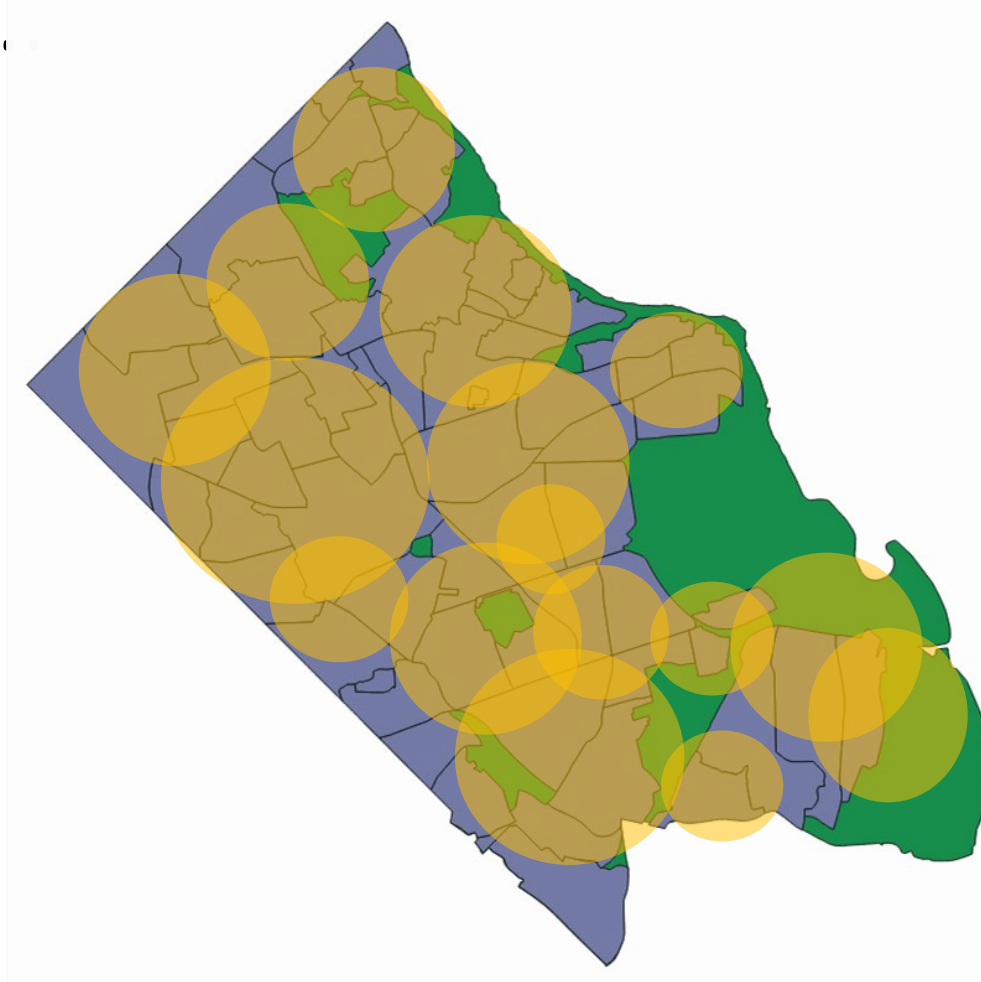
Duke Banks 2017 – 2019

Sandy Newton 2019 – 2020

Resolution is available in its entirety in a link in the chat for online participants and handouts for in-person participants

The Problem

Siloed concerns and frustrations in each community...



Different communities, different issues,
but the core tactics and outcomes were almost always the same

Issues in transparency, accountability and inclusivity in Arlington County governance



The lonely utility pole at Columbia Pike and S. Frederick Street in Sept. (staff photo by Matt Blitz)

A Flurry of Activity at the Serrano Apartments After Residents Decry Conditions

Jo DeVoe May 20, 2021 at 3:45pm



Dirty plumbing systems with molding, standing water in one unit of the Serrano Apartments (Photo courtesy Elder Julio Basurto) 4/5


Virginia Courts Case Information				
Name List	Pleadings/Orders	Services	Main Menu	Logoff
Arlington County Circuit - Civil Division				
Case Details				
Case Number: CL22002001-00	Filed: 05/25/22			
Filing Type: Declaratory Judgment				
Number of Plaintiffs: 0001	Number of Defendants: 0004			
Commenced By: Initial Filing				
Bond:	Complex Case:			
If there are more than three plaintiffs or defendants as indicated under "Number of Plaintiffs" or "Number of Defendants" in the table above, please contact the court for the additional party information.				
Plaintiffs				
Plaintiff:	COUNTY BOARD OF ARLINGTON			
Trading as:				



8th Street "improvements"—to be improved soon...

The Solution

Civic Federation is uniquely positioned

A stylized map of Arlington County, Virginia, is positioned on the left side of the slide. The map is divided into various colored regions: light blue for most of the county, dark blue for some central areas, and green for the western and southern portions. The map is partially obscured by the text box.

“The Arlington County Civic Federation (“ACCF”) is a not-for-profit corporation which provides a forum for civic groups to **discuss, debate, inform, advocate and provide oversight on important community issues, on a non-partisan basis.** Its members include over **ninety civic groups** representing a **broad cross-section of the community.** Communications, resolutions and feedback are provided to the Arlington County Government on a regular basis.”

It's completely normal to

- Disagree
- Debate
- Provide alternative viewpoints



With

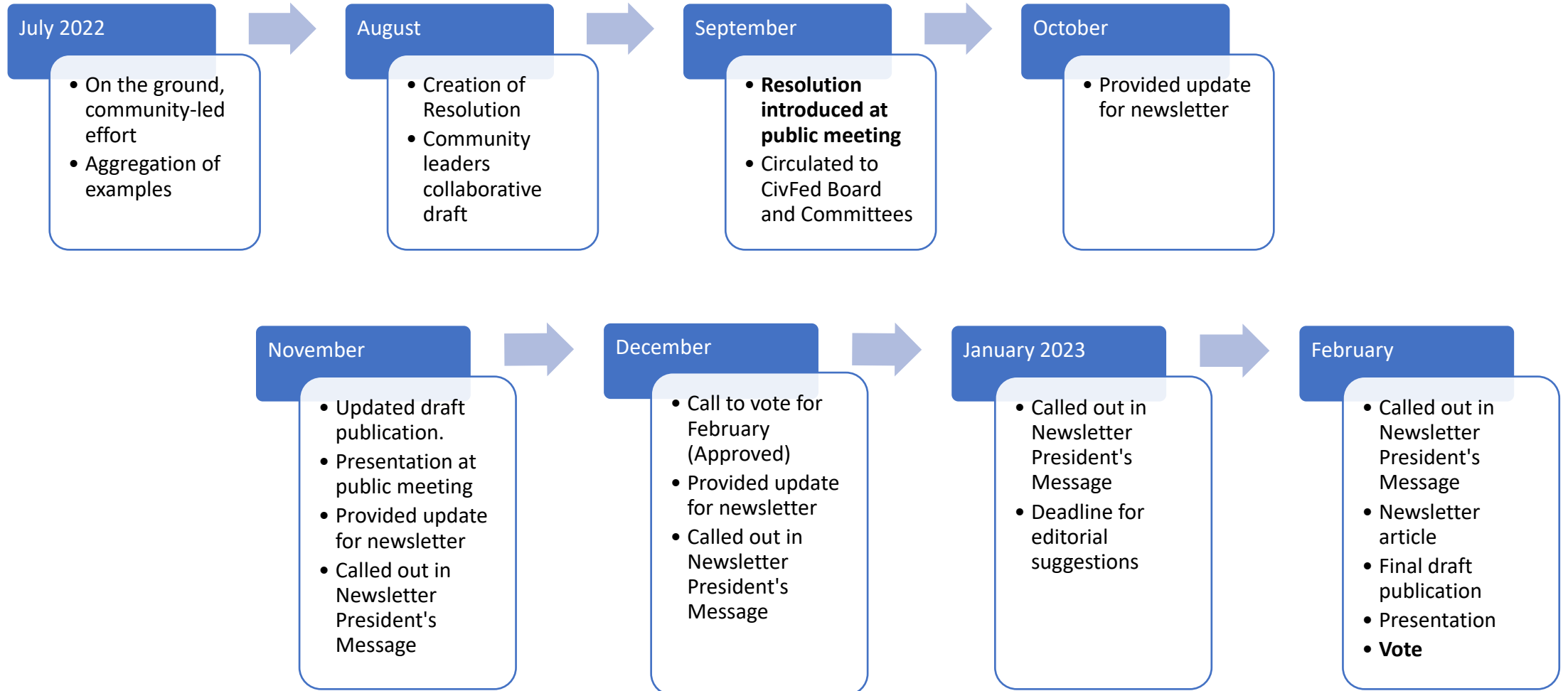
- Respect
- Appreciation that your experience may be different
- Thoughtful contributions

The power of a well-vetted resolution...

- Shine a light on issues: i.e., equity, inclusion, infrastructure, spending, chickens, etc.
 - Recognize that not everyone in the membership will be impacted in the same way
 - Provide substantive examples
 - Recommend thoughtful action steps to the Board for consideration
 - Engage in a conversation with the board
 - Create opportunities for membership to interact with the board and staff on progress on resolution
- You are not alone for wanting better from Arlington. Thousands stand with you.
 - Our partnerships and coalitions can help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices

The Iterative Progress

Resolution: Extensive Public Notice & Vetting



Over the course of 5 months since it was presented,
Everyone was encouraged to...



- Published Deadline of Jan 18 to allow review & incorporation.
- All feedback received was evaluated and considered.
- Revised drafts published Nov 3 and Feb 6.

Examples continue to be received. New non-civfed website created so those can be captured:
www.RestoreConfidenceinArlingtonVAGov.com

Nearly 300 global news sites published website's announcement

Final Resolution for tonight's discussion and vote

Draft (Updated 6 February 2023)

Resolution to Restore the Public's Confidence in Arlington County Governance

Whereas, public participation processes are based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have the right to be involved in the decision-making process and all perspectives should be represented in civic engagement.^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Whereas, for decades Arlington County had an established, bottom-up community engagement process to make decisions, frequently called the "Arlington Way".^{5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15}

Whereas, in this process Arlington residents had a meaningful seat at the decision-making table, which resulted in robust community discussion, producing consensus-driven outcomes that have made Arlington one of the most sought-after places to live in the nation.^{16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25}

Whereas, it appears to many residents that the current community engagement methods are unevenly applied or have fundamentally changed and no longer consistently includes critical engagement principles and features, and where far-reaching decisions may be made without incorporating substantive resident input or broad community consensus.^{26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39}

Whereas, it appears to many residents that the Arlington County Board and County Manager frequently dismiss concerns of individuals, civic groups, civic associations, multi-family residence associations, and the Arlington County Civic Federation, which historically have played an integral role in the county's decision-making processes.^{40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45}

Added the first Whereas clause

Decoupled the appendix

- Now a separate standalone Report
- Does not require CivFed approval
- includes a disclaimer that it is not approved by the Civic Federation.

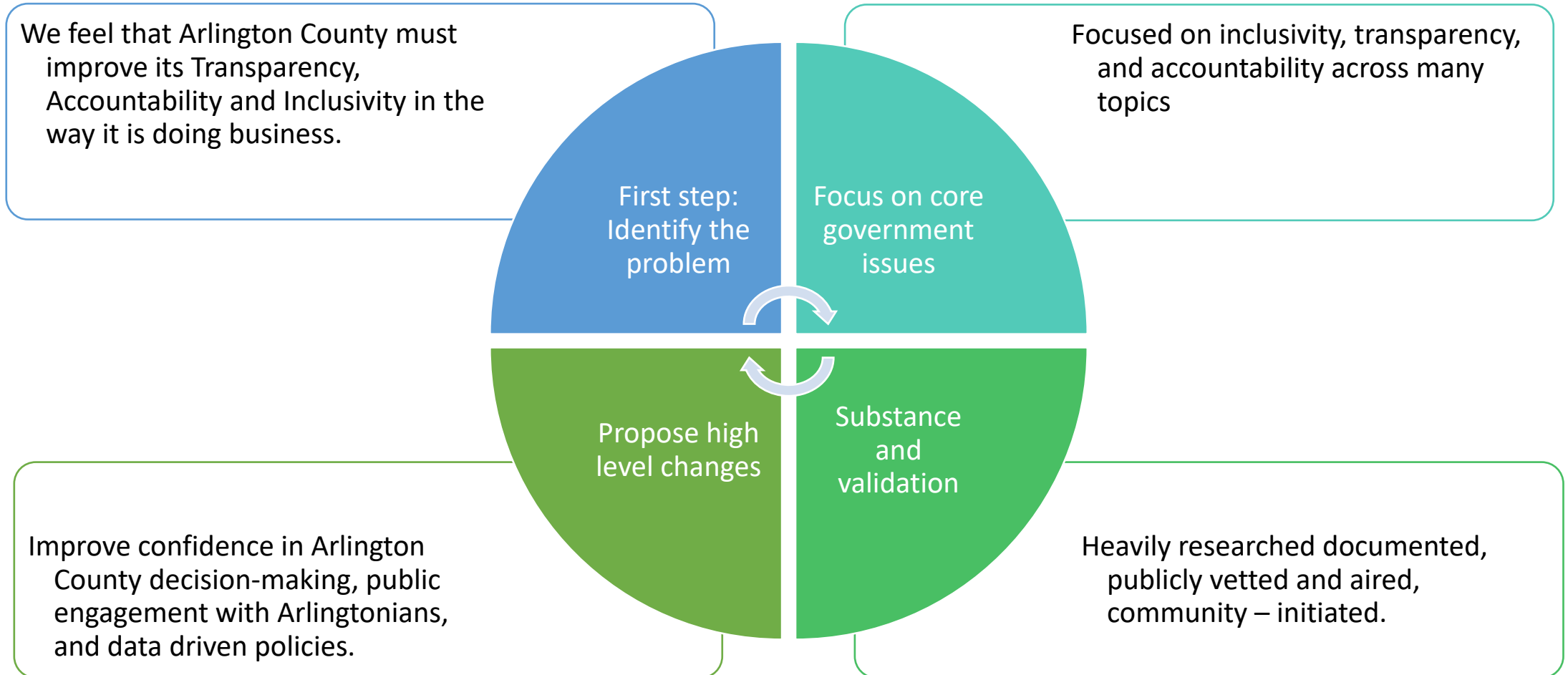
Added endnotes to Resolution (rather than referring to the Report)

- Incorporated feedback conceptually and in specific edits.

Provided additional references where it provided clarity

The Resolution

Resolution Summary



Sample Contributing Examples:

Example: Accountability

Resolution:

- Require involvement of outside stakeholders, including communities
- Authorizes access to all relevant data, not just that provided
- Requires empirical, data-backed analysis
- Closes loop, including public in analysis

Board financial disclosure and conflict of interest documents are not available via the Open Data Portal.

Public Spaces Master Plans⁴⁵² staff could not validate how they achieved the Level of Service numbers.



FOIA Concerns raised over Open Data Portal.

e. Reinstitute and improve the Staff Liaison Handbook and provide Staff Liaison training;

5. ***Establish interdepartmental after-action, lessons-learned review committees (including community representatives) to track/document outcomes and continuously improve.***
 - a. *Authorize review to collect data (and, where necessary, to request the collection of relevant data) for analysis of major policy/procedure, planning and project initiatives or changes to empirically determine what has worked, what hasn't worked (and why) in order to recommend changes that correct negative or unintended consequences, better inform future decision-making, and improve outcomes going forward.*
 - b. *Apply the same county open-data, open-government and public-engagement standards. Publicly present lessons learned, improvement recommendations and recommendation implementation, and other information to the County Board consistent with the Board's role of monitoring the implementation of policy;*

6. ***Enact a policy preventing the implementation of plans, policies or projects (new major initiatives or revisions) in the absence of a thorough and data-supported analysis of***

Example: Transparency

- No accurate measurable public accounting of the value of “community benefits”
- Acknowledge lack of relevant data
- Acknowledge impact on equitable outcomes
- Limit burdensome restrictions on FOIA requests
- Require specific data throughout process
- Introduce policies ensuring transparency in the future

FOIA Requests and Fees



Sample Contributing Examples:

Community benefits enforcement and transparency:

- Consultant Report on Site Plan Conditions recommendations appear to have not been implemented.
- Amazon HQ2 Penn Place Site Plan and Pentagon City Sector Plan approvals appear to lack transparency of community benefit- to-density calculations



Whereas, the outcome of land-use plan development processes appears to focus almost exclusively on increasing density and satisfying developers' goals and interests without providing specific metrics to document an equitable focus on achieving a balanced outcome that mitigates negative community impacts and enhances the long-term livability of both existing and new residents.^{76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86}

Whereas, there is no accurate, measurable public accounting of the value of the “community benefits” developers offer as part of the site plan process and likewise no accurate public accounting of the value of the density and other benefits that property developers receive in return, leaving the public in the dark as to whether or not what is received is of roughly equivalent value.^{87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93}

2. **Support in spirit (not just the letter of the law) open-data and open-government principles and regulations** by revamping the county's current policies and methods, especially with respect to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, to ensure the prompt release of all relevant data and to significantly reduce the withholding of information or making the public pay to obtain public information. Make all notices, policies, guidance, data, analysis and objectives available to the public before, during and after each process; allowing participants to observe meetings and review notes from ALL county meetings including using technology to record and livestream its public meetings, to publish all residents' feedback frequently and broadly, and to restore transparency in all its process and engagement activities; and providing public notices to larger audience bases to comply with the spirit of the law;
3. **Reconvene and reinvoke the Arlington County Open Data Advisory Group and**
6. **Enact a policy preventing the implementation of plans, policies or projects (new major initiatives or revisions) in the absence of a thorough and data-supported analysis of the potential and cumulative impacts** (net effects on costs, budgets, personnel, capacity and service delivery).

Example: Inclusivity

- End engagement practices that are pre-determined, provide skewed and limited input
- Acknowledge specific practices that stifle full and equitable inclusion
- Acknowledge structural issues limiting inclusivity
- Expand notices, times, languages, and barriers to representation

Letter of Intent with developer before Process began West Rosslyn Planning Study (WRAPS)

LETTER OF INTENT
for
Ground Lease and/or Purchase and Sale Agreement
With the County
for the
Wilson Boulevard Project Site

This Letter of Intent ("LOI"), dated January 15, 2013, between The County Board of Arlington County, Virginia ("Board" or "County") and Penzance Properties, LLC, a District of Columbia limited liability company ("Penzance"), may serve as the precursor to a purchase and sale agreement, a ground lease agreement or similar agreement (in all cases, the "Agreement") for certain property in Arlington County, Virginia owned by the County Board as more fully set forth below.

Sample Contributing Examples:

Police Practices Review: Consultant's Report release delayed by County Manager.

Courthouse West Survey: Only allowed selection between 3 options.



Whereas, the current community engagement process is perceived by many to marginalize or stifle substantive criticism from residents about proposed County policies by such methods as not recording public comments, using "push poll" surveys that are structured to support a single point of view, providing on-line only presentations that do not allow for two-way communications, encouraging advocacy group support, not recording or posting public minutes, and failing to include some letters from the public record.^{54, 55, 56, 57}

Whereas, the citizen-commissioner appointment process and objectives lack transparency for member and Chair selection and seems to result in commissions that lack a diversity of opinion or thought and do not necessarily reflect the views of the public at large.^{58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66}

1. **Recommit to the "Arlington Way" principles and processes** where the intent of community engagement is to give community members a meaningful role at the decision-making table by including the public in robust two-way conversations – to incorporate and address public concerns and ideas; to acknowledge and address substantive public criticism; **encourage a diversity of thought and information in all processes**; fully answer the public's questions and concerns (providing all relevant information/documentation whether or not it supports the County's position); **provide a full accounting of support and public participation**; identify areas of common objectives to build genuine consensus in order to produce outcomes that better serve the community's interest and are perceived as legitimate, unbiased, and fair; improve engagement timeframes; provide information in advance with proper notice; **create neutral survey tools to collect statistically valid, unskewed results**; improve transparency of the Board's monitoring of the implementation of policy; create an equitable balance between development interests and residents' interests; **relax public comment requirements** and reduce reliance on both Consent Agenda and Closed Sessions; and further expand the Six Step Guide beyond Capital Projects, such as planning and zoning initiatives; **expand public notice, engagement times, engagement timeframes and languages**; **revisit prior recommendations to improve civic engagement**; and **realign the County Ombuds role to allow for independence from County operations**;

Public Confidence Topics

15 min Accountability

15 min Transparency

15 min Inclusivity