

*Draft as of 11 Sept 2022*

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

*Whereas, for decades the Arlington County had an established, bottom-up process to make decisions, frequently called the "Arlington Way"; [Appendix, 1]*

*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. [Appendix, 2]*

*Whereas, the current community engagement methods have fundamentally changed, where far-reaching decisions are made without incorporating substantive resident input or broad community consensus (e.g., the Pentagon City Sector Plan update, Plan Langston Boulevard, Missing Middle Housing); [Appendix, 3]*

*Whereas, the Arlington County Board frequently dismisses concerns of individuals, civic associations and its umbrella organization, the Arlington County Civic Federation, which historically have played an integral role in the county's decision-making processes; [Appendix, 4]*

*Whereas, the current Arlington County Board, County Manager and staff conduct processes frequently led by outside consultants that lack transparency and seem to be designed to reach a single, predetermined conclusion (e.g., Public Spaces Master Plan update) without addressing substantive community concerns expressed during the process; [Appendix, 5]*

*Whereas, the current community "engagement" process tends to marginalize or stifle substantive criticism by failing to keep records of public workshops (providing only summaries that may not accurately reflect the balance of favorable/unfavorable comments), county board and staff encouraging and preparing special interest groups/individuals to speak publicly against resident concerns, launching heavily biased "push" polls instead of statistically sound surveys, moving engagement entirely online (excluding significant portions of the population), and by keeping some resident input (submitted to the Board) hidden from public view; [Appendix, 6]*

*Whereas, the citizen-commissioner appointment process lacks transparency 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; [Appendix, 7]*

*Whereas, the County frequently allows nonresidents (principally paid developer staff) to freely opine at Arlington's public forums and workshops while strictly limiting residents' opportunities to speak, thus skewing the information being presented; [Appendix, 8]*

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

Whereas, certain types of meetings exclude public attendance—even when the planning is holistic in nature (not a specific site plan)—permitting developers, approved “stakeholders” and staff to meet during “office hours” in a way that skirts public “sunshine” laws’ [Appendix, 9]

Whereas, the outcome of land-use planning and development processes focus almost exclusively on satisfying developers’ goals and interests without 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; and [Appendix, 10]

Whereas, there is no accurate public accounting of the value of “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 what received is of roughly. [Appendix, 11]

Whereas, the County continues to enact further restrictive rule and limitations on public speaking [Appendix, 12]

Whereas, there is a lack of data transparency and accessibility as well as properly working systems causing significant impediments to residents’ ability to view and participate in County activities in a transparent way. [Appendix, 13]

**Therefore let it be resolved**, the Arlington County Civic Federation requests that in order to restore faith Arlington County governance, the Arlington County Board, the County Manager and staff must;

1. **restore the Arlington Way principles** where the **intent of community engagement** is to incorporate and address public concerns and ideas, encourage a diversity of thought and information in all processes including advisory commissions, provide a full accounting of support and public participation, create an equitable balance between development interests and residents’ interests, and giving community members a **meaningful** role at the decision-making table—not just an opportunity to opine;
2. **ensure full government transparency** by making all data, analysis and goals available to the public before, during and after the 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 public process and engagement activities;
3. **revitalize efforts towards data driven decision making** by reinvigorating the Arlington County Open Data Advisory Group and encourage County Commissions

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

and County Advisory groups to use Data driven analysis to form their recommendations.

4. **ensure consensus-driven, good-faith planning and development for any proposed density increases** by analyzing, incorporating public concerns and input and providing a comprehensive plan to address the impacts to services, facilities and the environment before and during a process.
5. **consider establishing a policy that a project will not move forward if such analysis cannot be provided** or the results of the data shows that the project is not in the best interest of the community.

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