

NAACP Draft (12 February 2023)

An AMENDMENT in the Nature of a SUBSTITUTE to be offered in discussion of the ‘Resolution to Increase the Public’s Confidence in Arlington County Governance’

Whereas, a signature feature of Arlington County governance is the “Arlington Way,” which relies on extensive engagement with Arlington residents to build consensus and implement policies with community support.^{1 2}

Whereas, in keeping with the Arlington Way, the County must ensure that its engagement methods adequately inform residents of policies in development and fairly capture the range of diverse views within the community.^{3 4}

Whereas, on September 14, 2021, the Arlington County Civic Federation approved a Resolution observing that “the perspectives of all communities including all racial, cultural, philosophical, and economic backgrounds, all sexual orientations, and all capabilities have not been historically represented in the viewpoints in civic engagement.”^{5 6}

Whereas, the Missing Middle Housing Study and other recent planning initiatives have highlighted shortcomings of the County’s methods of engaging residents.^{7 8 9}

Whereas, these shortcomings have given many residents the impression that the County pursues predetermined outcomes, stifles public feedback, ignores criticisms of policies in development, and makes decisions without community consensus.^{10 11 12}

Whereas, the County can increase public confidence in County governance by providing more opportunities for two-way conversations, improving accessibility of information about policies in development, explaining how public input shapes those policies, and engaging with more residents—including renters, lower-income residents, disabled residents, and residents of color.^{13 14 15}

Therefore, let it be resolved, the Arlington County Civic Federation calls on the County Board and the County Manager to increase public confidence in County governance by:

1. Recommitting to the Arlington Way by publicly pledging to improve the County’s methods for engaging with its residents, in collaboration with the Arlington County Civic Federation and other community groups;
2. Hosting more public meetings with opportunities for live, two-way conversations with County Board Members, the County Manager, and County Staff, including by holding some regular meetings of the County Board and advisory groups in neighborhoods of historically marginalized residents;

3. Responding promptly and timely to public feedback on County policies in development, with sufficient specificity and clarity that the community can understand whether, how, why that feedback will shape policy;
4. Investing more resources in comprehensive planning and developing a more sophisticated, data-driven toolkit for anticipating and addressing likely impacts from County policies;
5. Updating and maintaining the County’s website to fix broken links promptly and make pertinent information about County policies more accessible;
6. Drafting community surveys in ways that minimize jargon and allow for expression of a wide range of viewpoints;
7. Ensuring that minutes and recordings of meetings of the County Board and advisory commissions are prepared and posted within 24 hours to the County’s website;
8. Bolstering recruitment for County advisory groups by advertising vacancies more prominently and sharing more information about selection criteria; and
9. Conducting retrospective studies on major County policies to determine whether they achieved their goals or had unintended consequences.

¹ Abbott Bailey, *Mapping the Arlington Way: Understanding the System of Citizen Participation in Arlington County* at 7 (June 2000), available at <https://www.civfed.org/newContent/2022-10/2022-10%20CivFed%20Res%20Bailey%202000%20Mapping%20the%20Arlington%20Way%20Understanding.pdf> (describing “the Arlington Way” as “a model that maximizes the use of citizens in the decision-making processes as a means for developing the best policy with the most community support.”).

² Ron Carlee, *The Arlington Way: Public Engagement as a Community Expectation*, National Civic Review (Spring 2019), available at <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/ncr-article/the-arlington-way-public-engagement-as-a-community-expectation/> (“What is the Arlington Way? In its most positive framing, the Arlington Way means engaging with the public on issues of importance or concern (not always the same) in an effort to reach community consensus or, in the lack of consensus, a shared understanding and an opportunity for everyone to be heard.”).

³ InsideNova, *Uniquely Arlington: ‘The Arlington Way’ remains elusive to define* (Oct. 5, 2015), available at https://www.insidenova.com/news/arlington/uniquely-arlington-the-arlington-way-remains-elusive-to-define/article_0bf65318-6b4f-11e5-bffd-7b81d88da822.html (quoting former Arlington County Board Chair Mary Hynes that the “success” of the Arlington Way “depends on inclusive, accessible, respectful, constructive and persistent, purposeful dialogue between government and those who live here and work here”).

⁴ John Kelly, *Interested in Arlington history? This is the place for you*, Wash. Post (May 30, 2015), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/interested-in-arlington-history-this-is-the-place-for-you/2015/05/30/6f092a0a-0611-11e5-8bda-c7b4e9a8f7ac_story.html (“There is no dictionary definition of ‘the Arlington way,’ but this is pretty close: Decisions that will affect the community are made only after input from all the voices in the community.”).

⁵ Arlington County Civic Federation, *Resolution to Affirm the ACCF’S Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging* at 1 (approved Sept. 14, 2021), available at <https://www.civfed.org/newContent/2021-09/2021-09%20ACCF%20DEBI%20Resolution%20APPROVED.pdf>.

⁶ Jo Devoe, *CivFed Resolves to Diversify Its Ranks, Broaden Its Outreach*, ARLnow (Sept. 29, 2021), available at <https://www.arlnow.com/2021/09/29/civfed-resolves-to-diversify-its-ranks-broaden-its-outreach/> (quoting CivFed’s then-President Allan Gajadhar: “The representation in the CivFed isn’t fully representative of racial and ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of Arlington. ... Our overall mission is to work toward an Arlington that works for everyone.”).

That is very much in line with improving diversity within CivFed and giving voice to people outside of traditional power and interest groups.”).

⁷ Arlington County Staff, *Missing Middle Housing Study: Expanding Housing Choice - Phase 2 County Board Work Session* at 12 (July 12, 2022), available at <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/cb-work-session-mmhs-phase-2-2022-07-12.pdf> (documenting the extreme underrepresentation of people of color, young people, renters, and multifamily dwelling residents among respondents to the county’s missing middle survey).

⁸ Compare Arlington County Staff, *Missing Middle Housing Study: Expanding Housing Choice - Phase 2 Analysis and Draft Framework* at 4 (May 2, 2022), available at https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/mmhs-phase-2-public-presentation_05.02.pdf (listing the missing middle “Study Goals” as “Increase housing supply” and “Diversity housing types”) with Arlington County Staff, *Community Conversations Notes* (Oct. 28, 2022), at <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/county-board/documents/misc/notes.missingmiddle.communityconversations10.28.22.final.post.pdf> (comments at county-led community conversations include: “Most residents don’t even understand this is going on”; “I think the goals are muddled”; “If this not about affordability, what really is the goal of the missing middle?”; “What this proposal is trying to achieve?”; “It seems to be a lot of conflicting goals”; “What is the problem that Missing Middle is trying to solve?”; “What problem does MMH deem to solve?”; “What issue is being addressed?”; “I really don’t understand what the goal is. What is the goal?”; “What is the problem we’re solving?”; “What problem is MM supposed to solve?”).

⁹ Mary Rouleau, *Progressive Voice: Time For an Arlington Way 2.0?*, ARLnow (Dec. 3, 2015), available at <https://www.arlnow.com/2015/12/03/progressive-voice-time-for-an-arlington-way-2-0/> (“My experience with housing issues over the past several years has demonstrated again and again that there is a wide information gap on that set of issues alone. ... It strikes me that so much energy goes into a typical Arlington study process on the front end that little remains for the rollout. Yet for many people, the rollout is the first time they become aware that change is happening.”).

¹⁰ Arlington County Staff, *Introducing Arlington’s Race and Ethnicity Dashboard* (last accessed Feb. 12, 2023), at <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Data-Research/Demographics/Race-Ethnicity-Dashboard/Arlington%E2%80%99s-Race-and-Ethnicity-Dashboard> (noting that participants in the county’s Dialogues on Race and Equity “raised concerns about lack of transparency associated with community engagement and public decision-making”).

¹¹ Alex Koma, *Nauck Residents Blast County’s Handling of Four Mile Run Valley Planning, Feel ‘Ignored’ and Excluded*, ARLnow (Sept. 19, 2018), available at <https://www.arlnow.com/2018/09/19/nauck-residents-blast-countys-handling-of-four-mile-run-valley-planning-feel-ignored-and-excluded/> (“As Arlington officials continue to chart out the future of the Four Mile Run valley, some community leaders in [Green Valley] feel their concerns are being ignored by the county and are demanding a louder voice in the proceedings.”).

¹² See Arlington County Civic Federation, *Resolution to Extend the Missing Middle Housing Framework Public Comment Period* (May 10, 2022), available at <https://www.civfed.org/newContent/2022-05/2022-05%20ACCF%20PSCComm%20Res%20Extend%20Missing%20Middle%20Comment%20Period%202022-05-10%20APPROVED.pdf> (urging the county to “extend the public review period for the Missing Middle Phase 2 concept plan ... to provide meaningful feedback before the framework is finalized”).

¹³ Jo DeVoe, *Is the ‘Arlington Way’ Too Narrow to Include All Residents? Some Say ‘Yes’*, ARLnow (Oct. 5, 2021), available at <https://www.arlnow.com/2021/10/05/is-the-arlington-way-too-narrow-to-include-all-residents-some-say-yes/> (“For years, Arlington County has acknowledged that its traditional engagement processes privilege those with the time, resources and connections to invest in discussions about projects, studies and policies. That leaves out a growing segment of the population outside that mold: renters, parents of young kids, people who work non-traditional hours, people without access to reliable and affordable transportation, and those who are not fluent English speakers.”).

¹⁴ Krysta Jones, *Community Matters: The ‘Arlington Way’ Must Continue to Incorporate Anti-Racist Practices*, ARLnow (June 9, 2020), available at <https://www.arlnow.com/2020/06/09/community-matters-the-arlington-way-must-continue-to-incorporate-anti-racist-practices/> (proposing “ways we can continue to incorporate anti-racism in the ‘Arlington Way’”).

¹⁵ Jane Green, *Making Room: Show Renters the Arlington Way in 2020*, ARLnow (Jan. 6, 2020), available at <https://www.arlnow.com/2020/01/06/making-room-show-renters-the-arlington-way-in-2020/> (explaining how the county’s “reliance on resident voices ... does not reflect Arlington’s diversity” and encouraging the county “to bring more renters into the civic engagement process”).