

**RESOLUTION: A RESOLUTION TO IMPROVE PLANNING AND ZONING
POLICY AND PROCESSES****DRAFT: 30 APRIL 2025**

Resolution by the Planning and Zoning Committee, Brian Harner, Chair; Jack Spilsbury, POC
glup.sc.chair@civfed.org. To be Introduced at the 13 May 2025 General Membership Meeting.

WHEREAS the Comprehensive Plan, General Land Use Plan (GLUP) and the site plan review process all significantly impact the future of Arlington neighborhoods and services, including equity of access to housing, transportation and traffic safety, adequacy of mitigation for flooding and heat islands, open space and green space, the County's 40% tree canopy goal, schools, public safety, libraries and community centers and more.

WHEREAS there is a planned update of these policies stated as a priority in the Department of Community, Planning, Housing and Development (CPHD) 2025-2026 work plan.ⁱ

WHEREAS the principles and policies of the Comprehensive Plan, including the GLUP, are being changed on a site-by-site basis, potentially setting precedent through these ad hoc decisions without adequate notice to, or opportunity for, public comment. Two significant examples are the disregard of the Plan's longstanding County policy of metro corridor and transportation-focused development and the principle of retaining and not upzoning defined low-density housing zones.ⁱⁱ

WHEREAS these concerns about policy and process transparency and reliability have been well documented and brought to the attention of the Board by the Arlington County Civic Federation (CivFed) through resolutions in June 2022 on Planning and Zoningⁱⁱⁱ and in Feb 2023 on Restoring the Public Confidence^{iv}, as well as in specific site plan recommendations for climate actions in a Resolution on Climate Adaptation in Nov 2024^v and related correspondence and meetings.^{vi}

WHEREAS Civic Associations (CA) that have participated in recent Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) Special GLUP reviews and Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) reviews for their neighborhoods have presented reports to the Civic Federation which identify and document significant common concerns with the policy and process that have impacted their communities, including a lack of transparency and predictability, and an uneven attention to critical aspects of the Comprehensive Plan that have led many stakeholders to conclude that the adopted policies no longer apply.^{vii}

WHEREAS Civic Associations have called for mechanisms to assure compliance over time (and over changes in ownership) with Site Plan Conditions that reflect the incorporation of community concerns and benefits including affordable housing, public space equity, landscaping buffers and plans, tree canopy commitments, and residential and retail parking requirements.

WHEREAS the County has initiated a zoning study to consider whether Arlington's zoning code (Section 15.5.3) provisions for modifications to approved site plans should be revised, and whereas such site plan amendments and administrative changes should not be a way to circumvent obligations imposed during the site plan process without adequate community notice and opportunities for further public input.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that CivFed requests that the Board commit to working with CivFed and facilitating CivFed work with the County Manager and staff to examine and discuss the following recommendations of this resolution, as part of the Board review and consideration of

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updates of the Comprehensive Plan and the General Land Use Plan and related policies, code and guidance:

1. **Provide the Board and the public with the expected dates and timeline for public release and public engagement for the following items listed in the CPHD workplan^{viii}:**
 - The Comprehensive Plan introductory section update. (A general schedule is posted but not a draft,^{ix})
 - The Special GLUP Policy and Process study
 - The County’s zoning study to consider revisions to Arlington’s zoning code provisions for modifications to approved site plans including major/minor amendments and administrative changes (Section 15.5.3)
 - Other GLUP, Zoning or site plan policy changes or studies underway including those related to changes of definitions and modification of allowable uses
 - An opportunity for comment on the administrative update to 4.1 released in March.
2. **Clarify in advance what substantive issues the Comprehensive Plan revisions intend to address.** To facilitate public engagement, information should be provided during engagement to make clear what the County Board and staff mean by references in the work plans to “people-centric guiding principles,” what “existing goals/objectives” these would “replace,” what “interwoven equity” and “responsible regionalism” mean, what phase 1 of the update would do to “scope” the work for updating the GLUP in phase 2, how “land use and placemaking goals” would be “update[d]” by reference to “Arlington’s vision for growth and development,” and what the plans mean by updating the “range of land uses,” including “establish[ing] new or broader land uses in focused areas.”^x
3. **Adhere to the currently adopted policy until such time as it may be changed by new Board policy following meaningful public engagement, including by civic associations.** The primary examples include the longstanding policy of Metro and transportation focused density and the principle of protecting low-density neighborhoods.
 - **Follow the principle in the Comprehensive Plan for the preservation of designated low-density residential areas and zoning.** Any revision to the Comprehensive Plan or the GLUP should clearly specify that the boundaries between planned higher-density and lower-density residential GLUP designations and zoning districts are planned in the district language, and that the “edges” between higher and lower density areas are therefore considered “planned” and not eligible for review as “unplanned areas.”^{xi}
 - **Ensure that any exceptions that permit increased density outside of transportation corridors are supported by safe and adequate transportation.** Currently, additional density is being approved for sites that are not in the Metro corridor and lack adequate access to transportation. At minimum, all site applications with proposed density in excess of that permitted by right under the Zoning Ordinance that are not in the transportation corridors

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should be required to include a County-developed transportation access and traffic plan for the site and the surrounding areas impacted by proposed increased density and up-zoning that provides the infrastructure for a traffic focused density and the justification for the exception.

4. **Consider alternate methods for changing the requirements of a zone** (such as the R5 zone) to determine if changes are best made for an entire zone, as through a definition change amendment, or as a change to the allowable uses. The critical difference is that allowable uses may be approved subject to review to determine that a specific site meets the infrastructure requirements for the use such as stormwater, traffic, parking and sewer, and subject to monitoring to ensure that the use continues to meet requirements without negative impacts. This strategic decision is particularly important in cases where the required planning and infrastructure review will not be undertaken or achieved for the entire zone.
5. **Direct the Zoning Administrator to provide notice and copies to the Board and all parties for requests for determinations that** occur during any phase of site planning, including prior to submission of site plan application documents and after site plan adoption. In addition, both the request and determination should be posted within seven (7) days on the County's website and emailed to the relevant Civic Association presidents so that all parties are aware and there is a genuine and timely opportunity for the public to appeal in cases that may set precedent or may exceed the Zoning Administrator's delegated authority.
6. **Establish a revised process for site plan notice prior to a formal Site Plan Review.** This process should include timely posting on the County's website project page when permits are submitted, email notice to adjacent and impacted Civic Association leaders of any pre-Site Plan submission to Staff, such as a Conceptual Site Plan or Preliminary Site Plan (along with a link to any relevant, published documents) and any substantive revisions to planning documents, and an identified staff POC where the community can direct clarifying questions for staff regarding any pre-SPRC submissions.
7. **Initiate a staff-hosted Introductory meeting to introduce SPRC participating parties when a developer contacts the County about initiating a site plan application.** The meeting will provide an opportunity for introductions and informal discussion prior to the formal process. It should include staff, the owner/developer, representatives from the appropriate Civic Associations (including adjacent civic associations) and other civic stakeholders and representatives from relevant Commissions. The agenda should focus on introductions, informal statements sharing objectives and expectations, and compiling and sharing points of contact for continuing discussions. Ground rules should be clear about the level of communication and time required, access for all, rules of civility, and a common goal to identify issues and work together openly for problem-solving. The current staff policy should be revised to permit equal opportunities for the owner/developer and

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relevant civic associations to discuss issues with staff, both before and after the formal filing of the site plan application.

8. **Add language to the SPRC process that allows all relevant civic participants to be included on the SPRC site plan roster and defines civic participants as** 1) the CA where the site is located, 2) CAs that are adjacent, 3) multi-family and condo associations that are adjacent, and 4) CAs or other civic organizations (such as multi-family residents, Town House and Condo associations) by a request process whereby they provide a rationale of how they believe they are directly impacted, e.g. related to impacts on common infrastructure such as traffic, stormwater, or a community facility such as a school.
9. **Develop language to provide guidance for the roles of SPRC participants including** managing, supporting, providing data, supporting transparency, seeking collaboration of all parties, identifying and representing the objectives for each role, providing critical factual review of the adequacy of methods for meeting priorities and objectives, identification of anticipated gaps that may require additional external review of support.
10. **Require that the SPRC documents and site plan approval documents are submitted** for County Board review and posted at least three (3) business days in advance of a meeting, or the item is deferred. Similarly, if materials are not available to members and the public at least three (3) business days in advance of a scheduled Site Plan Review Committee or Planning Commission meeting, the discussion will be postponed. This will ensure that all parties have access to the same information and have had an opportunity to review at the same level of depth and detail as other stakeholders in the process.
11. **Revise the SPRC process and related guidance to establish and ensure that information from CAs is included** in the record and addressed by staff, the SPRC, and the Planning Commission on an equal basis as the materials provided by staff and developer. This will begin to include and recognize CAs and the community as partners in the process. In particular, the County Board should ensure that the County Manager's site plan report and recommendation to the board, and the Planning Commission's recommendation, include (a) all reports from any Civic Associations or other members of the SPRC, (b) a complete response to any such Civic Association reports, and (c) the SPRC Chair's report.
12. **Ensure that there is a publicly available checklist of the new 4.1 application requirements^{xii} and SPRC review requirements by topic that includes data and reports that should be prepared and submitted** by the County staff, Applicant, or others, including data from other entities. Currently, the review of priorities is uneven with some items of critical information about potential significant community infrastructure impacts and the equity of those impacts omitted from the process. At a minimum, the checklist should include the requirements from the Comprehensive Plan, the GLUP,

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and the zone the project is located in and the zone requested. Each item on the checklist should list specific topics and requirements. This should include, but not be limited to:

- Transportation context data such as Virginia Department of Transportation traffic information and plans, County studies or plans in process, third-party multimodal transportation safety and traffic studies for surrounding area, developer site level studies;
- Housing context data such as current housing gaps (both at a county level and in the vicinity or neighborhood areas related to the site);
- Stormwater Risk Assessment Management Plan (RAMP) inundation studies for the site and area^{xiii};
- Tree canopy requirement and proposals for the site and the relative equity for the surrounding area; and
- Open and green space, pervious surfaces and relevant heat data and the relative equity for the surrounding area.

13. **The SPRC review and responses to the site plan checklist site should be included in each SPRC site plan review.** The reports and analysis that respond to the checklist for the site shall be published to the site plan website, and each subsequent phase shall require a further revised checklist.
14. **Work with the community to establish a clear, written, transparent process for negotiating community benefits associated with development projects, which** will then be amended into the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance. This should include clarifying the definition of the community benefits to identify what community receives the benefit and creating a site-level report format that provides the community with a clear understanding and tracking of each of the benefits, including monetary value for each, proposed by the County, the applicant, or the civic participants. This format should be a tool for a review process that includes community input in assessing the comprehensive checklist of potential public benefits and for subsequently tracking and assessing whether and to what extent such benefits actually have been implemented.
15. **Develop a basic report format for tracking implementation of approved site plans,** including monitoring and assessing adherence with site plan conditions such as the delivery of community benefits, including a section on the number and types of housing units built and specifically how affordable housing commitments are included in site plan approvals and implementation.
16. **Establish systematic monitoring of site plan implementation including compliance with site plan conditions and post-approval amendments and/or administrative changes.** Many adjustments are made, both with and without Board approval, following the conclusion of site plan approvals. The assessment of the process should be based on the ability to review implementation compared to plans and objectives. Since the definition of administrative amendments or minor amendments generally excludes them from opportunity for input by the public, these amendments should not

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include any changes materially inconsistent with previously approved conditions, or that would otherwise significantly affect any areas represented by the organizations that participated in the site plan review process.

ⁱ CPHD Work Plan [https://meetings.arlingtonva.us/CountyBoard/Documents/DownloadFile/_%20-%20Item%20Attachment%20-%20PRESENTATION%20OF%20THE%20PLANNING%20DIVISION%20WORK%20PROGRAM%20\(CA.pdf?documentType=1&meetingId=2664&itemId=55156&publishId=61813&isSection=False&isAttachment=True](https://meetings.arlingtonva.us/CountyBoard/Documents/DownloadFile/_%20-%20Item%20Attachment%20-%20PRESENTATION%20OF%20THE%20PLANNING%20DIVISION%20WORK%20PROGRAM%20(CA.pdf?documentType=1&meetingId=2664&itemId=55156&publishId=61813&isSection=False&isAttachment=True); accessed 4/30/25

ⁱⁱ February 22 County Board Meeting, Item 21 Melwood; <https://youtu.be/iLJTHcGbWwA>

ⁱⁱⁱ ACCF Public Services Committee Resolution to Improve Public Input for Planning, GLUP and Zoning Change Processes; https://www.civfed.org/newContent/2022-06/2022-06%20ACCF%20PSComm%20Res%20GLUP_Planning_Input%20APPROVED.pdf

^{iv} ACCF Resolution to Restore the Public's Confidence in Arlington County Governance [Mar 2023]; <https://www.civfed.org/newContent/2023-03/2023-02-28%20CivFed%20Res%20Restore%20Public%20Confidence%20in%20Arlington%20County%20Governance%20APPROVED.pdf>

^v ACCF Public Services Committee Resolution on Climate Adaptation [Nov 2024]; <http://www.civfed.org/newContent/2024-11/2024-11%20ACCF%20PSComm%20Res%20Climate%20Adapt%20APPROVED%2020241112.pdf>

^{vi} ACCF letter on GLUP and site plan re Melwood, ACCF letter on GLUP and Site for 2480 S Glebe, Plan Green Valley

^{vii} ACCF Planning & Zoning Committee web page; <https://www.civfed.org/about-us/committees/planning-and-zoning/>

^{viii} CPHD Workplan, [https://meetings.arlingtonva.us/CountyBoard/Documents/DownloadFile/_%20-%20Item%20Attachment%20-%20PRESENTATION%20OF%20THE%20PLANNING%20DIVISION%20WORK%20PROGRAM%20\(CA.pdf?documentType=1&meetingId=2664&itemId=55156&publishId=61813&isSection=False&isAttachment=True](https://meetings.arlingtonva.us/CountyBoard/Documents/DownloadFile/_%20-%20Item%20Attachment%20-%20PRESENTATION%20OF%20THE%20PLANNING%20DIVISION%20WORK%20PROGRAM%20(CA.pdf?documentType=1&meetingId=2664&itemId=55156&publishId=61813&isSection=False&isAttachment=True); accessed 4/30/25

^{viii} Board meeting April 5 and April 9, Item 21 on 2480 S 24th Road and Glebe, Green Valley; https://meetings.arlingtonva.us/CountyBoard/Documents/DownloadFileBytes/County_Board_Regular_Meeting_at_Central_Library_Auditorium_a_2632_Agenda_Packet_4_5_2025_9_30_00_AM.pdf?documentType=5&meetingId=2632&isAttachment=True; accessed 4/30/25

^{ix} Comprehensive Plan Update Project, <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Plans-Studies/Comprehensive-Plan/Update>
^x Comprehensive Plan Update Project, Background and Phase One Update, <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Plans-Studies/Comprehensive-Plan/Update>

^{xi} GLUP Changes and Special GLUP studies, Special GLUP Studies, "A Special GLUP Study is needed in instances when a GLUP amendment request has been made where there is no adopted plan or when the request is inconsistent with the guidance of the relevant adopted plan, per the Special GLUP Study Resolution." The page has a link to the text of the Special GLUP Study Resolution, entitled "County Board Policy Statement Regarding Consideration of General Land Use Plan Amendments Unanticipated by Previous Planning Efforts," <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Plans-Studies/General-Land-Use-Plan/Studies>

^{xii} Administrative Regulation 4.1, <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Building/Review-Processes/Site-Plan/Administrative-Regulation-4.1>

^{xiii} Risk Assessment Management Plan (RAMP), <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Plans-Studies/Environment/Risk-Assessment-and-Management-Plan>