

**RESOLUTION: A RESOLUTION TO IMPROVE PLANNING AND ZONING
POLICY AND PROCESSES****DRAFT 2: 30 MAY 2025**

**Resolution by the Planning and Zoning Committee, Brian Harner, Chair; Jack Spilsbury, POC
glup.sc.chair@civfed.org. Introduced at the 13 May 2025 General Membership Meeting for consideration by the
General Membership at the 10 June 2025 General Membership Annual Meeting.**

WHEREAS Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan, General Land Use Plan (GLUP) and site plan review process determine the future of Arlington neighborhoods, office/commercial and other development trends, and public services, including equity in access to housing, transportation and traffic safety, mitigation of flooding and heat islands, proximity to open and green space, reaching the County's 40% tree canopy goal, and levels of service for schools, public safety, libraries, community centers, etc.;

WHEREAS a Comprehensive Plan update is a priority in the Department of Community, Planning, Housing and Development's (CPHD's) 2025-2026 work plan, as is a review of the Special GLUP Study process;ⁱ

WHEREAS the Arlington County Civic Federation (CivFed) has adopted resolutions relating to planning, policy, process, transparency and public engagement issues, including in June 2022 on Planning and Zoning,ⁱⁱ and in Feb 2023 on Restoring the Public Confidence,ⁱⁱⁱ as well as in Nov 2024 on Climate Adaptation,^{iv} and in related correspondence and meetings;^v

WHEREAS Individual Civic Associations (CivFed member organizations) participating in recent Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) Special GLUP Study reviews and Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) meetings have documented to CivFed significant concerns about policy and process issues that are impacting their communities, including a lack of transparency and predictability and an uneven attention to critical principles of the Comprehensive Plan;^{vi}

WHEREAS reporting from Civic Association participants also highlighted the need to refocus the review process to promote collaborative research, review, and problem-solving, and identified changes needed to support this goal including engaging the community with information and discussions earlier in the process, improving public access to plain English documents at all phases, and including the community as recognized partners in the review process;

WHEREAS Board actions on recent development proposals also have raised concerns that the County may be moving away from adopted County policies and principles including the principle of retaining (not upzoning) defined low-density housing zones; and the long-standing transit-oriented development policy that focuses growth and density near Metro corridors;

WHEREAS Civic Associations have called for new mechanisms to assure compliance over time (and over changes in ownership of sites being developed in their communities) with site plan requirements and conditions, including provision of community benefits, which address community concerns such as affordable housing, sustainability improvements, community facilities, and public infrastructure; and

WHEREAS Arlington County has initiated a zoning study to consider whether to revise its Zoning Ordinance (Section 15.5.3) provisions for modifying approved site plans, and

WHEREAS such site plan amendments and administrative changes should provide adequate community notice and opportunities for informed and substantive public input to ensure that developers continue to comply with obligations imposed during the site plan process.^{vii}

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED be it resolved that CivFed asks the County Board to consider the following recommendations to clarify top-level direction in land use and development in Arlington 2050: Guiding Our Path, and updates to the Comprehensive Plan, the General Land Use Plan, and related zoning and administrative policies and guidance. We also ask that the County Board commit to working with CivFed and facilitating CivFed's work with the County Manager and staff to examine and discuss these recommendations, as part of the Board's review and consideration of these planning and development policies.

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1. **Publish a master timeline and engagement strategy including the dates for engagement opportunities and public release of proposals and drafts relating to the following County initiatives:**
 - Updates to the Comp Plan and GLUP, for which there is an announced strategy and initial timeline but no detail on the scope and methodology of engagement and no drafts;^{viii}
 - The Special GLUP Study Policy and Process review;
 - The County's study to consider revisions to its Zoning Ordinance provisions for modifying 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 to include those related to changes of definitions and modification of allowable uses; and
 - An opportunity for comment on the update to the Administrative Regulation of Zoning Code 4.1, released in March 2025.^{ix}
2. **Clarify, no later than July 15**, the substantive changes being considered as part of the revised introduction to the Comprehensive Plan, as well as how phase 1 of the Comp Plan update will "scope" or control the work to update the GLUP in phase 2. At a minimum:
 - Indicate in plain language the concrete actions related to concepts such as "people-centric guiding principles," "interwoven equity," and "responsible regionalism."
 - Explain how "land use and placemaking goals" would be "update[d]" in reference to "Arlington's vision for growth and development," and what updating the "range of land uses," including "establish[ing] new or broader land uses in focused areas,"^x means for actual development precepts and prospective land use countywide.
 - Explain how these relate to the County's plans to revise existing Comp Plan and GLUP principles.

B. Comprehensive Plan and GLUP Policy

3. **Adhere to the currently adopted Comp Plan and GLUP policy until such time as it may be changed by new County Board policy, after conducting meaningful two-way public engagement that includes Civic Associations and other public stakeholders.** Some key examples include the principle of preserving low-density neighborhoods and the longstanding policy of transit-oriented development that focuses growth and density near Metro corridors.
4. **Require that any increased density outside of transit corridors is supported by safe public transportation that provides an adequate level of service.**
 - All site plan applications with proposed density exceeding that permitted by right under the Zoning Ordinance that are not located in transit corridors should be required to include a County-developed public transportation access study that includes existing traffic count data for adjacent roads and arterials as well as level-of-service data for nearby intersections.
 - Proposals for upzoning density should not be considered unless adequate infrastructure/capacity is either a) already available that can meet the public's transportation needs post development, b) the county has a plan to provide such infrastructure, or c) the applicant will provide the necessary infrastructure via site plan conditions to ensure that the public's transportation needs will be met post development.

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5. **Establish a revised process for communicating site-plan-related notices prior to the formal Site Plan Review that includes:**
 - Posting materials on the County website's project page when permits are submitted;
 - Sending email notices to adjacent and impacted Civic Association leaders of any pre-site plan submissions such as conceptual and preliminary site plan documents as well as substantive revisions to planning documents; and
 - Posting clear information on relevant staff contacts.
6. **Require staff to introduce all SPRC stakeholders as soon as a staff member is assigned to a site plan project.** The meeting will provide an opportunity for introductions and informal discussion prior to the formal process to promote collaboration. This should include the owner/developer, representatives from the affected Civic Association (including adjacent civic associations) and other civic stakeholders and representatives from relevant Commissions. The process must permit equal opportunities for input from all participants.
7. **Add language to the SPRC process allowing all relevant civic participants to be included on the SPRC site plan roster. Define civic participants as** 1) the Civic Association (CA) where the site is located, 2) CAs that are adjacent, 3) multifamily, townhouse and condo associations that are adjacent, and 4) other CAs or civic organizations, by request, if they can document direct impacts to them (e.g., stormwater management/flood risk, school capacity, parking, traffic safety etc.).
8. **Post a publicly available checklist for new 4.1 application requirements and SPRC review requirements** by topic that includes data and reports that should be prepared and submitted by the County staff, the applicant or others, including data/reports to be produced by third parties.
 - The responses and analysis that respond to the site review checklist should be published to the site plan website, and each subsequent phase should require a further revised checklist.
 - The checklist should specify Comprehensive Plan, GLUP and existing zoning requirements as well as requirements for the zoning being requested (if different from existing zoning).
 - The checklist should list specific topics and requirements to include:
 - i. Relevant transportation context data, such as Virginia Department of Transportation traffic information data and plans, County studies or in-process plans in process, third-party multimodal transportation safety and traffic studies for the surrounding area, and developer site-level studies;
 - ii. Relevant housing context data, such as current housing gaps (both at a county level and in the vicinity or neighborhood areas related to the site);
 - iii. Stormwater Risk Assessment Management Plan (RAMP) inundation studies for the site and area;^{xi}
 - iv. Sanitary sewer and water infrastructure data documenting capacity to serve the site and vicinity;
 - v. Tree canopy requirements and proposals for the site and an equity assessment for the surrounding area; and
 - vi. Open and green space, pervious surfaces and relevant heat data and an equity assessment for the surrounding area.
9. **Revise the SPRC process to include Civic Association input in the public record** and ensure staff addresses community input. Give Civic Associations equal opportunity for presentation, review and discussion at SPRC and at the Planning Commission meetings as is given to materials provided by staff and developer. The County Board should ensure that the County Manager's site plan report and recommendation to the Board as well as the Planning Commission's recommendation include (a) all Civic Association and other SPRC stakeholder reports/input, (b) a complete staff/applicant response to any such Civic Association reports/input, and (c) the SPRC Chair's report.

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- 10. Establish a clear, written, transparent process for negotiating community benefits in coordination with the community associated with the development project.** This procedure should be reflected in an amendment to the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance. To enhance transparency, a site-level report format should be developed to give the community a clear understanding of the potential benefits under consideration (including an approximate value when possible) as part of the site plan review process. This report format should include a summary of community feedback assessing its priorities.
- 11. Develop a basic reporting format to track the implementation of approved site plans** and the applicant's adherence to site plan conditions, including a list of required community benefits, the number and types of housing units built, the number of on-site affordable housing units (if built), the amount of any housing contributions, and deadlines or due dates for compliance with these and other conditions.
- 12. Establish a system to track post-approval site plan amendments and/or administrative changes and their impact on approved site plan conditions.** Since administrative changes and "minor" site plan amendments may exclude or considerably lessen an opportunity for public review and input, these changes and amendments should not include any that are materially inconsistent with previously approved site plan conditions or that would result in a negative impact on community stakeholders.
- 13. Direct the Zoning Administrator to provide notice and copies to the County Board and all stakeholders for administrative determination requests that occur during any phase of the site plan process,** including both prior to submission of site plan application documents, as well as after site plan adoption. Both the request and administrative determination should be posted within seven (7) business days on the County's website and emailed to relevant Civic Association presidents so that all stakeholders are notified, allowing sufficient time for the public to appeal determinations that may set precedent or exceed the Zoning Administrator's delegated authority.

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 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%20PSCComm%20Res%20GLUP_Planning_Input%20APPROVED.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ 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>

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

^v ACCF letter on GLUP and site plan re Melwood, [Jan 26, 2025], and ACCF letter on GLUP and Site for 2480 S Glebe, Plan Green Valley, [April 3, 2025], <https://www.civfed.org/about-us/committees/planning-and-zoning/>

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

^{vii} Arlington Zoning Code section 15,6,3 https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/building/documents/codes-and-ordinances/aczo_effective_5.10.2025.pdf

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

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

^x Comprehensive Plan Update Project, <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Plans-Studies/Comprehensive-Plan/Update>

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