

CHAPTER 1. PAST AND PRESENT – THE PLANNING CONTEXT

A. VISION

Arlington's vision for public spaces builds upon the central concepts of the County's vision statement that is highlighted below. Public spaces sustain a community and strengthen its identity by providing the common ground where diverse people can interact and come together to build the meaningful connections that are important to healthy community and civic life. Attractive, well conceived public spaces and the programs and activities that they support are key catalysts for community education, energy and growth. In a densely urban community, public spaces also protect natural areas and provide the environmental balance and relief so vital to long-term sustainability.

Arlington County Vision

Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important.

The three aspects of the County's vision most relevant to public spaces are:

Community Health and Quality of Life:

Public spaces are the unifying element in the community and critical to ensuring a healthful environment and a high quality of life. They provide relief from the stresses of urban density, protect the natural ecosystem, enhance air and water quality, preserve habitat that supports a rich diversity of plants and

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animals, and protect and restore waterways essential to the environmental health of the community and region.

Connecting Community: Arlington's public spaces connect people to people and provide a common ground where people of diverse backgrounds and interests can reinforce a shared identity as Arlingtonians. Public spaces also connect residents and visitors with natural resources and link habitats through wildlife corridors. Trails and stream valleys have the added benefits of linking Arlington with nearby jurisdictions.

Accessibility and Inclusion for Everyone:

Physical access to public spaces is, of course, basic. The ability of all persons to enjoy public spaces should be a focal point of design, going beyond the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. No less important is access for low income Arlingtonians and for those living in high density areas. These elements of the population use public spaces as a necessary extension of their living space. The County's assurance of well distributed public spaces will respond to those needs.

These themes were set forth in the vision statement in Arlington County's 1994 *Open Space Master Plan*. Much of that vision is still relevant today. It has been modified to reflect the broader scope of this *Public Spaces Master Plan*.

Public space is a unifying element in the community, the "common ground" where the community comes together.

To fulfill this vision, this plan delineates six objectives as the framework for county initiatives and investment in public spaces during the next decade. Each objective is to be achieved through specific actions which are summarized on the next page and described in more detail in Chapter 5.

Public Spaces Master Plan Vision

Open space benefits Arlington County through the conservation of natural and heritage resources, the protection of environmental quality, the provision of public facilities, the enhancement of neighborhoods, and the provision of visual and aesthetic relief in high density urban areas. An array of public spaces — parks, natural areas, attractive streetscapes and scenic views, pedestrian passageways, landscaped buffers, historical sites, community centers, cultural spaces and athletic fields, amongst others — helps to make Arlington County an attractive and hospitable community for families, individuals, workers and visitors from all social and economic circumstances. The wise management of public space provides a vital framework for the unique features, character and history of Arlington.

Objective One: Balance Acquisition and Development of Public Spaces

The County has a strong system of parks and recreation facilities, but the community has expressed a clear, documented need for additional aquatic facilities, fitness space, teen centers, athletic facilities, and arts and multi-purpose spaces, along with more trails and natural areas. High-priority actions to attain this objective include implementing the North Tract Master Plan, planning and developing public spaces along Four Mile Run and in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor, and developing strategies for land acquisition and the location of facilities.

Objective Two: Preserve and Enhance the Environment

Creating and preserving natural spaces is a top priority for the community, to be emphasized in designing a new park, developing facilities or acquiring land. This objective focuses on developing policy and management plans to protect and manage natural resources and enhance the County's commitment to "Green" practices.

Objective Three: Improve Access and Usability

The community must be able to get to public spaces to use them. This objective encompasses ensuring access that meets the spirit as well as the letter of the Americans with Disabilities Act; ensuring that facilities can be reached by multiple means of transportation; creating more linkages through the trail system, and reducing economic barriers to enjoyment of these county spaces and resources.

Objective Four: Enhance Arts, Culture and History

Arlington has established itself throughout the region and nation as a community that offers unique, dynamic arts activities and one that provides focused attention to historic preservation. This objective focuses on developing a major arts and cultural center at Courthouse Plaza, and on promoting the integration of cultural and historic components in a broad range of spaces and programs.

Objective Five: Develop and Enhance Partnerships

Over the years, Arlington has developed a number of partnerships that enhance the amount of available public space and program offerings. The County needs to continue to create and expand partnerships with Arlington Public Schools and other government, private and non-profit organizations. This objective is to be met by developing a partnership policy to guide future decisions, by maximizing existing partnerships, and by reviewing and updating all agreements.

Objective Six: Manage Assets Effectively

The County has established a full complement of facilities and program offerings. This objective involves enhancing how the assets are designed, funded, maintained and managed. Recommended actions include improving program operations, including pricing and cost recovery, and developing a technology plan.

B. PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

The 2005 *Public Spaces Master Plan* (PSMP), which was adopted by the Arlington County Board on December 10, 2005, updates and replaces the 1994 *Open Space Master Plan* (OSMP). The OSMP was the County's first comprehensive plan to address Arlington's open space needs in a ten to twenty year time frame. It provided an inventory of the County's open space system and a general framework for policy direction and decision making. Although the 1994 OSMP was a good initial step, it lacked the detail and substance necessary for full utilization as a decision making tool.

The 2005 *Public Spaces Master Plan* is primarily a planning document that identifies the major public space needs of the community and builds upon the goals and objectives identified in the 1994 plan. It also incorporates new tools, ideas and information unknown ten years ago. It is intended to be a dynamic, living document – one that gets used and will allow for consideration of changing conditions and ongoing public involvement. Its themes and objectives provide the framework for wise stewardship of Arlington's public spaces for future generations to enjoy. The general and specific action recommendations will guide decision-making -- including administration, funding, operations, maintenance, and capital investments -- for the next ten to twenty years. Implementation of the recommendations is subject to the county's

future funding and resource allocations and priorities.

For purposes of this plan, public spaces are defined as:

- ▶ **Passive park lands and natural areas** – These lands include non-developed natural resource areas and semi-developed and managed parklands. Typically these areas are open for public use, but designed for low-impact recreational activities such as walking, jogging (individually or in small groups), picnicking, wildlife viewing, reading, non-motorized boating, fishing, and/or minimal human use. They often function as wildlife corridors, view sheds, conservation areas, tree canopies, urban buffers, storm and natural water management areas, and non-major arterial trails within parks. Nature centers, while categorized as “indoor” centers as described below, are often grouped with these spaces because their primary function is the interpretation of the surrounding natural areas and local and regional environmental education.

- ▶ **Active outdoor parks and facilities** – These spaces include the more developed park lands and athletic fields designed for higher impact and/or group recreational activities. They include managed turf and synthetic turf athletic areas, athletic courts, playgrounds, major arterial trails and pathways, community canine areas, large picnic areas, picnic shelters, skate parks and outdoor group gathering areas.
- ▶ **Indoor recreational, nature, arts, cultural and historic facilities and programs** – These include community centers, nature centers, art and cultural facilities, theatres, and historic facilities. These are typically designed for intensive public use and programming.
- ▶ **Urban streetscapes, and related facilities and services** – This category includes the plazas, sidewalks, walkways, broad medians, and related urban spaces that provide gathering places in urbanized areas, help define and connect major development corridors, and serve as links between commercial and residential areas.

Arlington has other public spaces within the County that are not addressed in this plan, including libraries, County administrative buildings, and county and state educational facilities.

C. PROGRESS OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS

Much has been accomplished since the 1994 *Open Space Master Plan*. One of the most important objectives realized in the last ten years has been a strategic acquisition of open space. Since 1994 the County has added over 63 acres throughout the County, primarily through fee simple acquisition and site plan negotiation. The acquisition program has been supported through a substantial voter-approved bond program. The table on the next page highlights some of the more significant acquisitions. Appendix A gives a full listing of parcels that have been added over the last ten years.

A second important achievement is the development and adoption of nine major park master plans and the adoption of the Urban Forest and Public Art Master Plans. The North Tract area is foremost among the adopted master plans. Four more park master plans are currently being developed. These park master plans are developed through a

It is important to note that, while similar in intent to the 1994 *Open Space Master Plan*, this plan is named the **Public Spaces Master Plan**. The change reflects the broader scope of this plan. The term “open space” typically refers to outdoor lands and natural resources. While “open space” is still used throughout this document, primarily in reference to previous documents or work, “public spaces” more accurately encompasses the full extent of Arlington County’s parks, natural resources, recreation, arts, cultural and historic facilities in addition to the urban streetscapes.

Land Acquisition from 1994-2004

Park	Acres	Year Acquired
Fort C.F. Smith Park	4.8	1995
Arlington Mill Community Center	1.9	1996
Fort Bennett Park	10.6	1996
Mosaic Park	1.1	1996 & 1998
Chestnut Hills Park	1.3	1996 & 1999
Powhatan Springs Park	5.3	1997
Bluemont Park (Reeves Tract)	2.5	2001
North Tract	21.45	2002
Jennie Dean Park	3.05	2002
Other Park Acquisitions	11.77	1995-2004
TOTAL	63.72	1995 – 2004

community planning process and illustrate at a conceptual level the types of facilities and the general location for amenities within a park. Appendix B identifies adopted park master plans and those currently underway.

Finally, significant park bond funding through the Capital Improvement Program has supported the construction of major facilities (Appendix C). Arlington residents have approved \$165.465 million for park improvements over the last ten years, including the most recent bond (2004)

for \$75.250 million. These capital investments include the renovation or replacement of community centers, major renovation or construction of parks, and the introduction of a new program to replace select grass athletic fields with synthetic turf, as well as funds to acquire park land.

Numeric and Qualitative Comparisons

Since 1994, the County has adopted Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to help inventory and manage its public land and facilities hold-

ings. The creation of the current GIS inventories has enabled the County to maintain more accurate counts of acreages and facility locations. However, the new system uses classifications and categories of lands that differ from those used in the 1994 plan, leading to an inability to directly compare holdings in 2004 versus 1994.

Public Spaces as of January 2005:

Arlington County Parks	919 acres
Arlington Public Schools	377 acres
Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (Arlington only)	150 acres
Federal lands with recreation amenities (Arlington only)	78 acres
Other federal lands with cultural and historic amenities (Arl)	974 acres
Private Open Space w/ Public Access Easements	7 acres

These lands total 2,505 acres, including both active and natural areas. In addition to the areas included above, the County has established a public-private partnership with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT). Eleven acres have been permanently protected through conservation easements or fee simple acquisition by the NVCT. The lands preserved through NVCT are critical to protecting the County's natural resources but typically are not available to the general public.



Ellipse Gallery

D. HISTORY OF PUBLIC SPACES

“When there are fields to run in, brooks in which to wade and trees to swing on, the need for public parks and organized ‘recreation’ is little felt”, say Alice Letzler and William Hughes in *History of the Park System in Arlington County*. That is a picture of Arlington in the early 20th century when much of the County was still undeveloped, but the picture has changed dramatically. Today the County is almost fully developed and the thirteenth most densely populated county in the United States.

Back in the mid-1900’s, the County Board began considering proposals for acquisition of property before development drove up prices, preserving “green fingers” along stream valleys and the Potomac River, developing a comprehensive plan for parks and playgrounds and hiring a recreation expert to study the County’s needs. During the 1940’s, a number of major steps preserved open space and provided recreation in the County. First, in 1940, the Trustees of Glencarlyn deeded to the County 95 acres of park land which form an important element of the Four Mile Run, Long Branch and Lubber Run open space system. Next, in 1943, Arlington voters approved a bond issue to acquire open space and flood control land. Subsequently, the County Board established a Recreation Advisory Board. In 1944, a recreation planning expert was hired to develop a master plan for open space and facilities for recreation.

Until 1948, organized park and recreation programs were still considered a responsibility of the schools. The maintenance of Public Spaces was a function of the County’s Engineering Department. In 1948, the School Board eliminated recreation funds from its budget. The County Board agreed to conduct park and recreation programs and maintain open space, and on July 1, 1948, the County’s Department of Recreation was created.

In its early years, the County managed 140 acres of open space, a few athletic fields and playgrounds, and offered basic programs such as softball, baseball and basketball. The amount of open space grew steadily during the 1950’s to 374 acres by 1959. In March 1959, staff completed the Report of Open Space in Arlington, which detailed the need for additional open space and park land. Following County Board adoption of the report, the County almost doubled its open space inventory to 606 acres by 1969. Several major parks were acquired, including Barcroft, East Falls Church, Gulf Branch, Lacey Woods, Madison Manor and Windy Run. The County also made the decision to link divergent open spaces owned by the County and public schools through a system of greenways.

In the 1970’s, 80’s and 90’s, Arlington County continued to grow and add resources and programs. Trail networks were developed in conjunction with ongoing transportation planning. Voters approved bond referenda that allowed

for continued acquisition, development and preservation of public lands. Acts of foresight took the opportunity to gain major resources such as Fort Ethan Allen and Fort C.F. Smith and enact major policy initiatives such as the Chesapeake Bay Ordinance. One of the last potential large areas for development, the North Tract property, was acquired for park development through innovative agreements with private interests.

Today, the County manages, 1,296 acres of public spaces and facilities including parks, community and nature centers, swimming pools, athletic fields and courts, playgrounds, cultural facilities and public art, community canine areas, picnic areas, school grounds and more. A wide variety of programs are provided including conservation and interpretation, recreation classes, camps, arts programming and sports leagues. The County is known for its innovative approach to planning and developing unique parks and facilities such as Powhatan Springs Park that features a skate park, youth-sized rectangular field and children’s rain garden. Other creative concepts are being realized in areas such as playgrounds with water spray elements and facilities that incorporate public art. The County has been a leader in its progressive adoption of the use of synthetic turf athletic fields. The high quality of the County’s cultural programming has been recognized for its excellence on a regional and national level.

E. RELATED PLANNING EFFORTS AND INTEGRATION

The county has a number of planning programs, listed below, that support Arlington's development goals and land use policy. This Public Spaces Master Plan is one of eight individual elements that comprise the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Comprehensive Plan Elements:

- ▶ General Land Use Plan
- ▶ Master Transportation Plan (includes Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Master Plans)
- ▶ Storm Water Master Plan
- ▶ Water Distribution System Master Plan
- ▶ Sanitary Sewer System Master Plan
- ▶ Recycling Program Implementation Plan
- ▶ Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance
- ▶ Public Spaces Master Plan*

*Two other elements are combined under the umbrella of this Public Spaces Master Plan in the Comprehensive Plan. They are:

- ▶ *Urban Forest Master Plan* (adopted July 10, 2004) Arlington's Urban Forest Master Plan is a tool to facilitate the County's ongoing commitment to enhance and preserve Arlington's tree canopy. The Master Plan has the following components: a Geographic Information System (GIS) street tree inventory, tree canopy satellite analysis, long-range goals and recommendations

and a final Urban Forest Master Plan report including GIS based planting plans. The plan will ultimately contribute to the attractiveness and sustainability of Arlington through enhancements to the tree canopy.

- ▶ *Public Art Master Plan* (adopted December 11, 2004) *Public Art • Public Places*, Arlington's Public Art Master Plan, is a tool for implementing the Public Art Policy that the County Board adopted in September, 2000. The public art policy reflects Arlington's general commitment to encourage excellence in the design of public facilities, and recognizes that public art—along with architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and historic preservation—is one of several important tools the County can use. The policy calls for the preparation of the master plan, operational guidelines for commissioning projects, and an annual work plan. This master plan, which guides public art projects initiated by County agencies, private developers and community organizations, is organized into four main components:
 - ▶ A long-term vision for public art in Arlington,
 - ▶ Strategies for integrating public art into Arlington's architecture, gathering places and natural landscapes, including federal, global and historic projects
 - ▶ Priorities for selecting public art projects, locations and proposals,

- ▶ A list of art projects to undertake over the next five years.

Comprehensive Plan Support Documents:

- ▶ Capital Improvement Program
- ▶ 7-Year Consolidated Plan and Annual Consolidated Plan
- ▶ Subdivision Ordinance
- ▶ Zoning Ordinance and Map

Sector Plans:

- ▶ Rosslyn Station Area Plan Addendum
- ▶ Courthouse Sector Plan
- ▶ Courthouse Sector Plan Addendum
- ▶ Clarendon Sector Plan
- ▶ Clarendon Sector Plan Addendum
- ▶ Virginia Square Sector Plan
- ▶ Ballston Sector Plan

Small Area Plans (examples):

- ▶ East Clarendon: Special Coordinated Mixed-Use District Plan
- ▶ North Quincy Street Plan
- ▶ Rosslyn to Courthouse Urban Design Study
- ▶ North Tract Plan Area Study
- ▶ Fort Myer Heights North Area Plan

Revitalization Plans (examples):

- ▶ Columbia Pike Initiative: A Revitalization Plan
- ▶ Lee Highway/Cherrydale Revitalization Plan
- ▶ Nauck Town Center