

Overview: Existing Conditions Analysis

The analysis is based on the County's preliminary aspirational goals for the 9 key planning elements of the Lee Highway process and recent dialogue with stakeholders and Working Group members. Here are some highlights of the analysis for each element:

Land Use

- The Core Study Area is primarily characterized by low-rise commercial land uses with pockets of multi-family residential communities.
- Because these land uses aren't integrated with each other, the area is missing the kind of mixed-use development that supports a walkable, "main street" environment.
- The current land use vision and zoning framework for the corridor limits opportunities for change, that could serve to meet the preliminary aspirational goals including walkability.
- With community input, the planning process will identify areas of change, the types of change appropriate for those areas, and where transitions in use will be most sensitive. It will test market potential for different types of development and uses, appropriate levels and location of uses including retail, parking, and amenities.
- This planning process will identify land use and zoning changes that will be needed, but those changes would be considered through a separate implementation process after the Lee Highway plan is adopted.
- Zoning tools developed for the Housing Conservation District in coordination with the Plan Lee Highway process will inform opportunities for preservation and change on Lee Highway.



Transportation and Connectivity

- The character and function of Lee Highway changes dramatically along the corridor.
- Generally, conditions aren't desirable for biking along or across Lee Highway. Additionally, the eastern part of the study area lacks alternate parallel routes for biking. Parts of the corridor have limited right-of-way and shallow lots, making it difficult to accommodate bicycle facilities.
- Lee Highway does not adequately accommodate multiple modes of mobility (i.e. pedestrian, bicycle and transit) and is auto-centric. This planning process will identify the roadway standards that need additional flexibility and strategies to achieve a multimodal corridor.
- All of the planning study area is within a 10-minute walk from a park. Generally, the population along the corridor is within a 2-minute walk from a transit stop, whereas, the population along the edges of the study area are within a 10-minute walk (although the walk may not be particularly pleasant).
- This planning process will identify ways to improve overall pedestrian and bicycle connectivity (including safer routes to schools), parking, and access to transit and public spaces throughout the study area.

Urban Design and Building Form

- The commercial corridor is generally characterized by minimal tree cover, large surface parking lots, narrow sidewalks and wide right-of-way.
 - Residential streets are generally pleasant, lushly landscaped and include street trees and adequate sidewalks where needed, although some neighborhoods lack pedestrian connectivity.
 - While Cherrydale and East Falls Church buildings have more ground floor uses and windows that activate the street with parking behind or under buildings, most commercial buildings along Lee Highway and other commercial corridors have fewer windows, less inviting doorways, big blank walls and parking in the front. Service and loading areas along the rear of commercial buildings are often adjacent to single family.
 - There are many types of residential development in the planning area that range in size (1/4 acre to over 7 acres) and height (2 to 9+ stories). Residential building typologies between two-family and multi-family (i.e. tri-plex, four-plex, six-plex etc.) do not exist in the study area. Transition challenges exist where 9+ story buildings adjoin single family homes.
- Roughly half of the parcels along Lee Highway are less than 90 feet deep, which complicates redevelopment and makes achieving transitions in height more challenging.
- This planning process will identify areas that will be impacted by change, necessary improvements to the streets, and appropriate development and building form that enhance the overall character of the neighborhoods and address transitions sensitively. It will also identify opportunities for additional height and density to realize desired community improvements - public spaces, affordability, and increased commercial and transit options.

Public Schools, Facilities and Spaces

- Public schools are close to or exceeding capacity and will continue to experience increases in enrollment as growth occurs both in and outside the Study Area.
- Public facilities are interspersed along the corridor providing for cultural, recreational and public safety. They are in various conditions and there is no flex space currently available for other County operational needs to support County residents, such as storage and equipment of materials.
- Public spaces are also dispersed throughout the corridor and complemented by other publicly accessible (privately-owned) open spaces that form a network of places, of limited connectivity, where people can meet for organized activities and casual use.
- Public schools, facilities and spaces are interconnected, however, there are physical barriers hindering access to some public schools, facilities and spaces including challenging street crossings, steep grade transitions, lack of sidewalks and bike lanes, poor wayfinding, and dead-end streets. Lee Highway is the most significant barrier separating neighborhoods from nearby public schools, facilities and spaces. This planning process will identify opportunities for connectivity improvements within existing ROW, through acquisition of new ROW and/or a public space access easement.
- This planning process will test impact on student enrollment (and other public facility needs) for new residential development arising from the land use scenarios developed for Lee Highway. It will further evaluate the County's existing inventory of educational, recreational and cultural assets (land and buildings) to explore opportunities for acquisition, expansion, renovation, redevelopment, consolidation, and co-location of uses.

Historic and Cultural Resources

- There are 12 historic resources (four individual properties and eight historic districts) listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) that are wholly or partially in the study area. Among these are the Cherrydale Volunteer Fire Department, Highland Park-Overlee Knolls Historic District, Stratford Junior High School and Waverly Hills Historic District.
- There are 7 County local historic districts (6 individual properties and 1 district) that are wholly or partially in the study area. Among these are Calloway Church, Dawson-Bailey House and Eastman-Fenwick House.
- A Cultural Resources Survey is currently underway. A total of 120 resources will be surveyed. It will research significant non-traditional resources such as places, people, events and stories in addition to buildings.
- The resources in the Lee Highway survey area that will be prioritized for research, surveying and documentation, have been selected from the sources and/or priorities listed below:
 - o Historic Resource Inventory (HRI)
 - o Legacy Businesses
 - o African-American Resources
 - o Civil War Forts
 - o Parks, Recreation, Public Spaces, and Community Facilities
 - o Properties with frontage on Lee Highway
 - o Modern Architecture
- The survey will be analyzed by staff to provide future recommendations that are consistent with the policies of the Historic Preservation Master Plan and Historic Resources Index, regarding appropriate levels of preservation.

Economic Vitality

- The Lee Highway economy is diverse, with a wide range of neighborhood-serving business types that relate to the street and community in different ways.
 - Roughly ¼ of ground floor businesses are some kind of dining or food and beverage experience.
 - Lee Highway has low vacancy and low turnover, thanks to high traffic that exposes businesses to thousands of customers daily; a mix of local-serving businesses and services; and moderate rents.
 - In general, the Lee Highway market has (compared to Arlington County as a whole): a higher household median income and home value; a higher share of owner-occupied housing; and a larger household size.
 - Lee Highway has a competitive advantage for neighborhood-serving businesses, however, there is significant competition for regional businesses from established destinations. Any regionally focused business will have to offer unique experiences and differentiating goods/services.
- Achieving the goal for redevelopment with mixed and complementary uses has trade-offs: a shift from an auto-oriented focus to a pedestrian focus could impact and displace auto-oriented businesses. Adding additional residents can benefit neighborhood-serving businesses.
- Mixed use development is not feasible along entire corridor, particularly on small parcels. It's mostly feasible in commercial parcels that are large enough and should be concentrated in nodes where other goals can be accomplished.
 - Achieving the goal to promote and strengthen a diverse commercial base requires understanding of existing market and exploring ways to encourage more business types that are well suited to existing market. Diverse commercial base includes a healthy mix of national and local businesses.
 - This planning process will: evaluate how much and what type of development is needed to maintain a diverse base of (existing and new) neighborhood-serving businesses; identify additional macro-economic trends that may influence the Lee Highway business ecosystem; and identify additional opportunities for diversification.

Housing

- 43% of housing units are single-family detached, 46% are multi-family and 11% are of a housing type other than single-family detached or multi-family housing.
- Only 15% of housing units are considered affordable housing.
- The current housing mix in the planning area provides limited opportunities for housing affordability and additional housing types beyond single-family housing.
- Existing development standards in Zoning Ordinance, including minimum parking requirements and minimum lot size requirements, currently impede development of diverse housing types.
- External factors, including high land acquisition and construction costs, can also constrain design and construction of diverse and affordable housing.
- The work to date on the Housing Conservation District areas on Lee Highway will be brought into PLH discussions as part of the land use scenarios.
- The work to develop draft Zoning Ordinance amendments to implement the HCD will occur concurrently with the planning process, and HCD recommendations will be coordinated with ideas and materials emerging from PLH. Both processes will continue to share findings to understand how one informs the other.
- No amendments for HCD would be adopted for the PLH areas until further reconciliation occurs, with input from the County Board.

Sustainability and Resiliency

- More than 61% of Arlington's energy use is connected to building sector consumption. The remainder (39%) is associated with transportation. A combination of strategies will be needed to achieve County's ambitious energy emissions goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.
- The core area currently lacks trees and has numerous surface parking lots that create a significant amount of impervious surface areas along the corridor.
- Flooding is occurring outside of flood plains and is brought on by intense storms, structures built over former streams and aging infrastructure - not just due to the high amount of impervious surfaces.
- Redevelopment will be an important part of meeting community goals related to sustainability (including energy, stormwater, and green infrastructure/trees). New developments can be built to perform better than existing conditions.
- County commitment may be needed to help offset costs of stormwater management and flood risk reduction requiring expanded engineering and technical approaches (watershed-scale as well as localized infrastructure projects) and align with private investments.
- The public spaces and stormwater management systems should be evaluated as an interconnected network, that together can work to minimize flooding impacts.
- This planning process will assess strategies for potential energy, stormwater and tree canopy improvements to achieve goals.