

Neighborhood Complete Streets Commission
Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 21, 2021 *Online Meeting*

- **Members Present:** Elisa Ortiz, Alistair Watson, Bill Braswell, Dwight Hlustick, Ed Hilz, Richard Gibson, Margarita Brose, Steve Wardell, Kevin Sweeney (quorum reached)
- **Members Absent:** Elizabeth Gallagher, Francesca Guerrero, Giles Crimi
- **Non-Members Present:** None
- **Staff:** Michelle Stafford
- **Meeting called to order:** 7:35 pm
- **Approval of Minutes:** Minutes from the May 2021 meeting approved unanimously
- **Chair's Report:**

Vacancies – The Chair reminded the Commission of the two existing vacancies, and encouraged sharing the application information with various community networks. The Chair was reappointed for another 1-year term.

Fire Code – The Chair met with separately with Arlington County Board Member Mr. Dorsey, and the County Manager, Mr. Schwartz, regarding the disagreement in the Master Transportation Plan and Virginia Fire Code about the design and width of yield streets. The Chair revised the draft letter to the Board in response to the conversation.

Capital Improvement Plan – The Chair will be speaking at the Board's CIP work session on Transportation on May 11. The issue of yield street widths will be included the Chair's remarks. All Commissioners are encouraged to contact the Board, and work through their other Committees to encourage resolution of the issue of street width.

- **Draft Letter on Yield Street Width:**

Discussion of the draft letter to the Arlington County Board.

MOTION: The NCSC submit the letter to the Arlington County Board this week with minor text edits as discussed.

(Moved: Elisa Ortiz, Second: Margarita Brose, YES: 9, NO: 0)

- **2022-2025 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP):**

Funding proposed for NCS in the Manager's DRAFT CIP:

<u>FY22</u>	<u>FY23</u>	<u>FY24</u>
\$2.185m*	\$1.016m	\$1.332m

*includes funds to implement two projects approved July 2020

In addition to the Chair speaking at the CIP work session on transportation, all are encouraged to contact the Arlington County Board.

- **Staff Update:**

The two capital projects at 7th Rd S and 13th St S both are moving towards construction this summer/fall. The proposed capital project at 28th St S is awaiting survey.

The Transportation Planning team has a new manager, Allison Bullock, who previously was a Capital Project Manager responsible for the two NCS capital projects.

- **Adjourned:** 8:45 pm

- **Next NCSC Meeting:** July 19, 2021 @ 7:30pm

Submitted by Michelle Stafford (7/15/2021)

Attachments: 1



Neighborhood Complete Streets Commission
Elisa Ortiz, Chair
Francesca Guerrero, Vice Chair
Willis Braswell, Jr.
Margarita Scott Brose
Giles F. Crimi
Elizabeth Gallagher
Richard Gibson
Edward Hiltz
Dwight Hlustick
Kevin Sweeney
Steve Wardell
Alistair Watson

June 23, 2021

Hon. Matt de Ferranti, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd. Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Neighborhood Complete Streets Program -
Requesting Board Decision re: Fire Code/Street Width Issue

Dear Mr. de Ferranti:

On behalf of the Neighborhood Complete Streets Commission (NCSC), I am requesting two actions from the County Board:

1. An expedited decision from the County Board and/or the County Manager on the County's approach to/policy regarding enforcement of the street width provision of the [Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code](#) (SFPC); and in the interim,
2. Guidance from the County Board on the direction of the Neighborhood Complete Streets (NCS) program in light of continued challenges the Commission faces identifying projects that do not conflict with fire code regulations as they are currently enforced in the County.

Background: The Master Transportation Plan (MTP) permits narrowing residential streets as a calming method. It allows for "yield streets" with parking on one or both sides, that are 22 to 32 feet wide, with a minimum 14-foot travel way or "clear width."¹

By contrast, the [Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code](#) (SFPC) calls for a minimum 20-foot clear width, which would indicate a 34-foot street including parking on both sides.² It does not

¹ Master Transportation Plan, Streets Element, pg. 31: <https://arlingtonva.s3.dualstack.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2017/04/October-2016-Amended-Streets-Element.pdf>.

² The SFPC incorporates the street width requirement by reference to the model fire code published by the International Code Council, Inc. In the 2021 International Fire Code, Section 503.2.1 provides that "Fire apparatus access roads shall have an unobstructed width of not less than 20 feet (6096 mm), exclusive of shoulders. . . ." Section 502 defines "Fire Apparatus Access Road" as "A road that provides fire apparatus access from a fire station to a facility, building or portion thereof. This is a general term inclusive of all other terms such as fire lane, public street, private street, parking lot lane and access roadway." <https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/IFC2021P1/chapter-5-fire-service-features>.

Hon. Matt de Ferranti, Chair

June 23, 2021

Page 2

permit "yield streets." As you know, many/most of Arlington's existing neighborhood streets do not meet this minimum requirement and it would be impractical or impossible to enforce that regulation throughout the county.

However, the situation we are seeing is inconsistent enforcement of the street width portion of the fire code on new transportation-related work on neighborhood streets. As projects are developed, they are subject to review by fire officials in the County, usually at the later stages of design. The Commission has been informed of at least one instance where a project developed under the Neighborhood Conservation Program was rejected at the last minute by fire officials in the County based on the street width portion of the fire code.

Most of the highest ranked projects on the NCS list will require building a sidewalk in order to make the street more complete; as such they will inherently run into street width considerations. As we have considered projects on the NCS list that involve changing street width, County staff have recommended, and the Commission has agreed, to pause consideration of at least one of the projects due to concerns about street width. At this time, we are hesitant to move forward with public engagement and development of the highest ranked projects on the NCS list without clearer direction from the County Board. As a result, the public funds the Board have allocated to the NCS program are currently not being utilized or are utilized for lower ranked projects on the list, which doesn't live up to the spirit or purpose of the program.

The [Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development \(DHCD\)](#) website clearly notes that enforcement of the SFPC is at the option of local governments. We have been informed that the County Manager and staff are working on a resolution to this issue, which the NCSC first raised as early as November 2020. Our understanding is that this issue has been discussed at the highest levels of the County government and the issue sits with the County Attorney for further review. We appreciate the action that has been taken so far, but strongly request an expedited resolution and/or updated policy so that we may continue to address important safety projects around the County.

In the interim, the Commission will work on identifying projects on our list that will not involve altering street width, which are generally ranked lower. While we remain dedicated to making Arlington's neighborhood streets as safe as possible for all users, ignoring the highest ranked projects on the NCS list – which are those with the most safety concerns – does not adhere to the program guidance and mission the County Board approved for the Commission. Therefore, we request any interim guidance the Board can provide about the Commission's work, especially if it differs from our proposed plan to work on projects that do not involve altering street width.

I would be happy to respond to any questions or concerns.

Hon. Matt de Ferranti, Chair

June 23, 2021

Page 3

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Elisa Ortiz

Elisa Ortiz, Chair

Neighborhood Complete Streets Commission

cc: Katie Cristol, Vice Chair
Christian Dorsey, Member
Libby Garvey, Member
Takis Karantonis, Member
Mark Schwartz, County Manager
Members, NCSC