

## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).


### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Arlington County Government  
Program Title: Arlington County's Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) and Public Engagement Process  
Program Category: Parks and Recreation

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Name: Mark J. Schwartz  
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## **Program: A Plan for Our Places and Spaces (POPS): Arlington County's Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) and Public Engagement Process**

### **Plan Overview**

Arlington County's Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) and public engagement process serve as a model for how to engage the broadest level of public participation when developing long-term public policy. The PSMP, one of eleven elements that make up the County's Comprehensive Plan, establishes the vision, policies and tools for the development and management of Arlington's diverse public spaces system comprised of a network of publicly and privately-owned spaces including parks, natural resources, recreational assets, and urban spaces. As a comprehensive long-term policy document, the PSMP establishes a Vision Statement that emphasizes the importance of a balanced system of public spaces that provides diverse opportunities for the Arlington community. The plan is organized around six Strategic Directions that provide overarching policy statements: Public Spaces, Trails, Resource Stewardship, Fiscal Sustainability and Partnerships, Programs and Operations and Maintenance. These Strategic Directions continue to build upon and advance the efforts from the previous PSMP, with eleven new Priority Actions and many specific recommendations to support each of the Strategic Directions. In all there are 214 specific recommendations in the plan, accompanied by a detailed appendices section which together provide the planning framework for the County's public space system for the next 10-20 years.

The public engagement and planning process to update the ten-year old plan kicked off in 2015 and lasted for almost four years. The planning process was led by the Department of Parks and

Recreation with oversight from a County Manager-appointed advisory committee and an interdepartmental staff working group. The process, informally known as POPS “A Plan for Our Places and Spaces,” included a robust multi-year public engagement process that reached out to the broadest possible audience through a wide variety of engagement opportunities. Public engagement tools included a statistically valid survey, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, pop-up events, a planning and design charrette with area professionals, formal public meetings, online feedback opportunities and presentations to various commissions and community groups. The County engaged with the consulting firm Wallace, Roberts and Todd, LLC as primary consultants to assist with the analysis of data and formulation of the recommendations contained in the plan.

Over the four-year public engagement process, the community conversations tackled the tensions that arose from competing interests and goals. One that generated significant conversation was the development of the County’s first level of Service (LOS) approach, a context-sensitive, activity-based methodology to meet the County’s current and future needs through population-based and access standards. Other fresh approaches in the PSMP are the development of comprehensive criteria for land acquisition, evaluation of athletic fields for potential conversion to synthetic turf or addition of field lighting, and a new category for dog runs. The plan also identifies and defines a new category of space, deliberately designed “casual use” spaces that support casual, impromptu use that is vital to the quality of life for all Arlingtonians. The result is a balanced plan embraced by the community that is inclusive,

sustainable, and supports recreation and leisure activities, environmental infrastructure, economic development and social health.

### **The Challenge**

Arlington County is facing significant challenges of balancing the competing needs of an increasingly dense population with limited land. The County may be at an inflection point: to maintain, preserve and protect the valuable resources currently in the public spaces realm while anticipating how to meet the pressure of future needs. Land is Arlington County's scarcest resource. The County is only 26 square miles in size, the smallest and most densely populated county in the country (8,708 persons per square mile). Its population of about 226,400 is forecast to reach 300,000 by 2040, and needs for more schools, public space and infrastructure are intense.

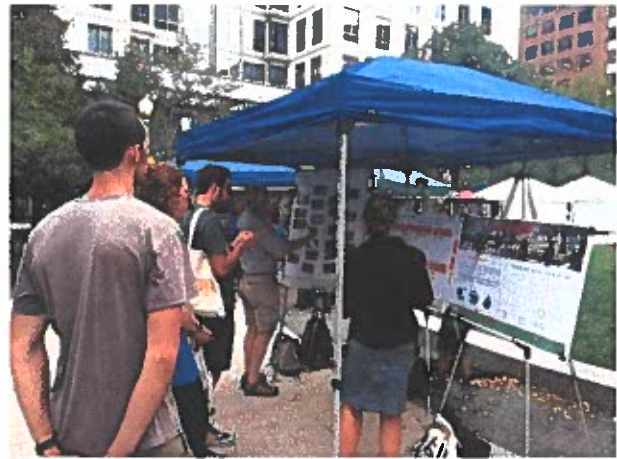
The PSMP update process sought to evaluate the goals, objectives and policies of the 2005 PSMP and test them against the current public space needs and priorities as well as community-identified values and develop a plan that will guide the County for the next 10-20 years. Major elements of the planning process included an updated inventory and analysis of existing public spaces, a multi-faceted needs assessment, a gap analysis and an implementation/action plan.

From the start of the planning update for the PSMP, the aspiration for the public engagement was to stretch beyond the typical traditional evening meetings and presentations to commissions and other groups and provide a variety of opportunities for the community to get involved. Engagement events were held at different times of the day/days of the

week/locations, including a happy hour event at a restaurant in the urban corridor and pop up opportunities at farmers markets and the community 4<sup>th</sup> of July event.



Public Engagement at Whitlows on Wilson



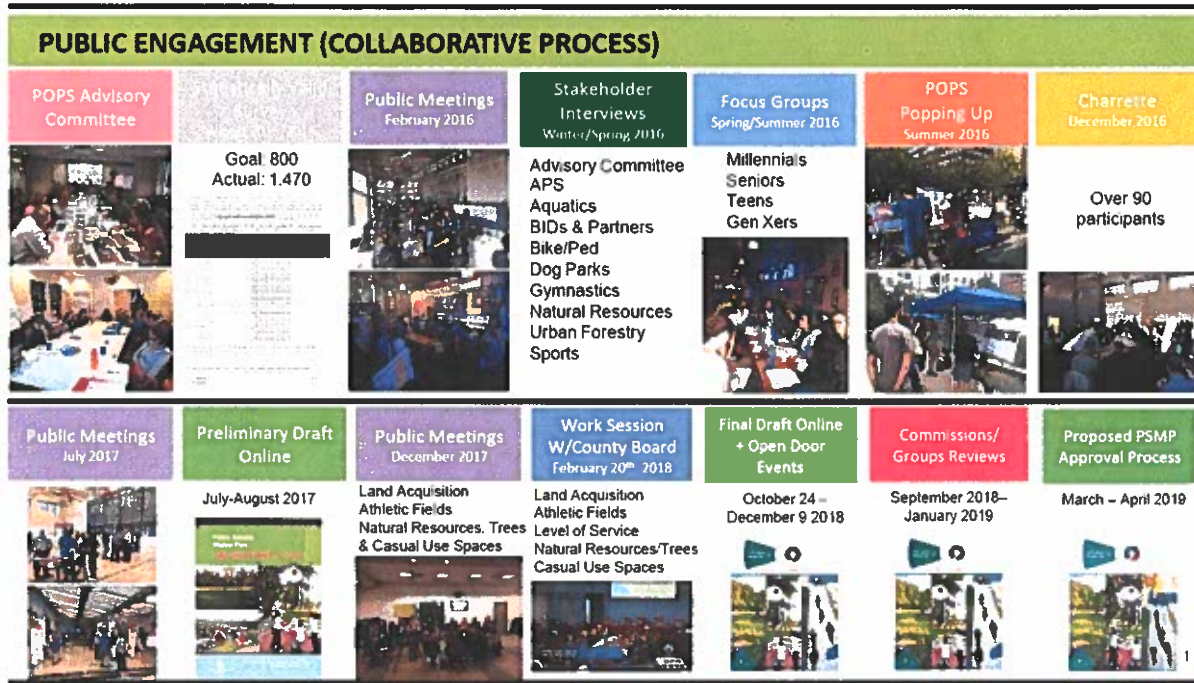
Pop Up Event at Metro Station

Groups that are usually underrepresented in formal meetings were engaged at focus group meetings for Teens (held at a teen lounge in one of the community centers), Millennials, (pizza was provided), Gen Xers and Senior populations. Interactive tools were employed such as large magnetic boards with words and pictures to get feedback on what types of amenities people associate with different types of public spaces. More than ninety planning, design and park and recreation professionals from the region volunteered a day of their time to participate in a charrette that focused on challenging public space issues. These tools are easy to replicate and are now being used in other County planning processes.

### **Plan Process**

The Department of Parks and Recreation led the four-year planning process to update the Public Spaces Master Plan. Collaborative public engagement was a central focus in the development of the PSMP. The image below highlights some of the many public engagement opportunities utilized. All the information gathered through these various opportunities helped

inform the plan recommendations. Each step of the public engagement is described in more detail below.



POPS Advisory Committee

In early 2015, the County Manager formed a Public Spaces Master Plan Advisory Committee and charged them with oversight for developing the plan update. The Committee was co-chaired by the Chair of the Park and Recreation Commission and the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation. The thirteen-member Committee included two at-large members, two staff members and representatives from the Commission for the Arts, Environment and Energy Conservation Commission, Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, Planning Commission, Sports Commission, Urban Forestry Commission and Arlington Public Schools. The Advisory Committee met 26 times over the course of the project and actively participated in the many public engagement activities.

### Statistically Valid Survey

The County conducted a statistically valid Community Interest and Opinion Survey at the beginning of the process in winter 2015/2016. Survey collected citizen input about public space needs and priorities. The goal was to receive 800 completed surveys, but ultimately received an overwhelming 1,470 responses. The survey covered topics including outdoor facilities, programs, public art and specific issues like concession sales in public spaces and the aquatics and fitness facility at Long Bridge Park. Households were asked to what degree their needs were being met for many amenities and then to rate each amenity in terms of importance. The top high priority outdoor facilities were hiking trails, natural areas and wildlife habitat, and multi-use trails, the top indoor facilities were swimming pools, exercise and fitness equipment and gyms, and the top programs were nature, fitness/wellness and events/festivals.

### Public Meetings

A series of public meetings were held at key points throughout the process to have meaningful conversations with the community and gather important feedback. The meetings were held at different times of day/days of the week/locations to provide broad opportunity for participation. The first series was held in February 2016 to introduce the planning process, present preliminary analysis results, gauge the community's perception of Arlington's current public spaces, and ask the community how they envision Arlington's public spaces in the future. Four meetings were held that incorporated conversations with staff and consultants; interactive activities including how the community would invest in public spaces, mode of travel (walk, bike, drive and public transit) and amount of time willing to spend to get to each type of amenity (in 5-minute increments), which amenities are most important, and whether there was

support for the sale of food and alcoholic beverages in public spaces; and a chat with the Director of Parks and Recreation.

The second series of public meetings consisted of three meetings to introduce the preliminary draft document and discuss strategic directions, priority actions and some “deep dive” boards for topical areas that emerged from earlier public input (land acquisition, Level of Service approach, athletic field lighting and synthetic turf, and casual use spaces). The deep dive boards focused conversation on areas where more information was needed to understand the issues or areas of new concepts like Level of Service and casual use. The third series was held in December 2017 to focus the community conversation on three of the more challenging topical areas, land acquisition, athletic fields, and natural resources/trees/casual use spaces.

#### Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

Stakeholder interviews were held over winter/spring 2016 to engage specific groups of interested stakeholders and discuss current and future needs. These included Arlington Public Schools, Business Improvement Districts, local/state/federal partners, aquatics, bicycle and pedestrian, dog parks, gymnastics, natural resources, urban forestry and sports. Focus groups were conducted in spring/summer 2016 for Teens, Millennials, Gen Xers and Seniors.

#### Pop Up Events

In the summer 2016, staff and members of the advisory committee attended different County events, including Arlington’s 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, the central library and six farmers markets. Participants used large magnetic boards to show how they would define the different types of public spaces and what their top priorities were.



## Charrette

In December 2016, Arlington County engaged a wide variety of planning and design professionals in a visioning charrette focused on providing physical and geographic context to some of the major themes and goals of the plan. Approximately 90 participants attended the event. Breakout sessions focused on six themes: enhancing recreation and sports facilities, reclaiming parking and highways, expanding waterfront access, leveraging temporary public space, improving trails and connectivity and defining casual use spaces.

## Public Feedback on Preliminary Draft and Final Draft PSMP

In July 2017, a preliminary draft document was released to the community. The County used an online tool to receive transparent feedback that would allow viewers to read all posted comments. A total of 828 comments were received online and via email. In October 2018, the final draft plan was released and received a total of 335 responses. To provide additional opportunities for a more informal dialogue, two open door events were held in November and December with approximately 40 individuals attending these events.

## Formal Engagement Opportunities

The Public Spaces Master Plan is an element of the Arlington County Comprehensive Plan and as such, more traditional engagement opportunities were also held throughout the process. These involved seven meetings with the Park and Recreation Commission, four meetings with the Long-Range Planning Committee, three meetings with the Bicycle Advisory Committee, three meetings with the Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and two meetings with the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board. At the time of the final draft (September to December 2018), the plan was presented to 20 commissions and organizations. The PSMP also required

formal public hearings for the Request to Advertise and Adoption. These were required for both the Planning Commission and the County Board. The Public Spaces Master Plan was adopted by the Arlington County Board on April 25, 2019.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The PSMP public engagement and planning process was led by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) with oversight from a County Manager-appointed advisory committee and an interdepartmental staff working group. One of DPR's senior planners served as the Project Manager throughout the four-year process. Many other DPR staff were involved throughout the process. The County also formed a PSMP Update Core Team led by the Department of Parks and Recreation and consisting of representatives from six departments and Arlington Public Schools. The Core Team met regularly throughout the development of the plan.

The total project budget was \$850,000. The County engaged the firm of Wallace Roberts Todd, LLC (WRT) to assist with the development of the PSMP. WRT also engaged the firms of PROS Consulting, Barth Associates, the Trust for Public Land, Mary Means and Associates, ETC Institute, Recreation Accessibility Consultants and Pennington Biomedical Research in the effort. The cost of the consultant contract was approximately \$649,995.

### **Plan Results**

The 2019 Public Spaces Master Plan replaced the 2005 Public Spaces Master Plan. As a comprehensive long-term document, the PSMP outlines 214 specific policy recommendations

accompanied by an appendices section which together provide a planning framework for Arlington's public space system for the future.

The plan identifies six Strategic Directions, each with its own set of Actions and Action Steps that will guide future decision making. The Strategic Directions and their areas of focus are outlined below:

- 1) Public Spaces – *Ensure equitable access for recreation, play and enjoying nature by adding and improving public spaces (land acquisition; level of service; casual use spaces; improving efficiency; making better use of existing facilities; support services and amenities; universal access; access to the Potomac River, Four Mile Run and tributaries; sustainability; and temporary uses)*
- 2) Trails – *Improve the network of trails to, within, and between public spaces to increase access and enhance connectivity (expand network of trails; improve existing trails; trails for all users; hiking trails; signage; and coordination and management)*
- 3) Resource Stewardship – *Protect, restore, enhance, and expand natural and historic resources and increase resource-based activities (update Urban Forest Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan; protect, restore and expand natural resources and trees; natural resources and design; nature-based programming; conservation stewardship and volunteerism; historic resources)*
- 4) Fiscal Sustainability and Partnerships – *Enhance the fiscal sustainability of Arlington's public spaces (Arlington Public Schools; federal, state and regional partners; support groups; volunteer programs; funding for development and maintenance; and non-County funding sources)*

- 5) Programs – *Ensure program offerings continue to respond to changing user needs*  
(evaluate demand and offerings; program life cycles; participation, finances and outcomes; programmed uses of indoor and outdoor spaces; strengthen health and wellness programs; and use programming to activate parks and public spaces)
- 6) Operations and Maintenance – *Ensure County public spaces and facilities are operated and maintained efficiently and to defined standards* (ensure maintenance standards are clear, consistent and being met; and strengthen sustainability practices)

Several important topics emerged during the planning process that are included in the PSMP for the first time. The plan identifies a new category of Casual Use spaces. The concept is one of intentionally designed spaces that provide for un-structured, impromptu uses and a connection with nature. Staff worked extensively with the advisory committee and engaged the public in trying to understand and define this important topic. The County has already started implementing the casual use concept in several park master plans.

One of the key priority actions from the 2005 PSMP was the development of a land acquisition policy. In response, the new PSMP recommends adding at least 30 acres of new public space over the next ten years. The plan also provides a set of criteria and methodology to evaluate potential acquisition opportunities. The plan also includes maps identifying potential sites for expansion of existing new public spaces and the protection of natural or historic resources.

One of the key fresh approaches that resulted from the public engagement and planning process was the development of the County's first established Level of Service (LOS) standards

for public amenities. The PSMP defines both population-based and access standards by amenity. The population-based standards are expressed as a Level of Service ratio of amenities (supply) to population (demand). The current ratio is then compared to a recommended planning ratio, which indicates whether more or fewer amenities are needed over time. Access standards were created as a planning tool to better understand the locations within the County where these amenities are needed. They are grouped into two categories: 1) those that should be reachable within 5 minutes of travel in a high-density area and 10 minutes of travel in a low-density area and 2) those that should be reachable within 10 minutes of travel in a high-density area and 20 minutes of travel in a low-density area.

Acquiring enough land to meet the future demand for athletic fields is not physically or financially practical. Converting existing grass fields to synthetic turf or adding lights to existing fields or both provides the best opportunity for the County to meet the demand for field space by expanding the hours of playing capacity on existing fields. In the plan appendices, there are two processes which evaluate all existing County and school field locations.

As Arlington continues to grow, the need for additional public spaces and competing interest for limited available land will increase the reliance on privately-owned public spaces to help meet the need of existing and future residents. When these spaces are appropriately designed, they can significantly improve the public realm and supplement the system of publicly owned spaces. The PSMP includes Privately Owned Public Space Design Guidelines in the appendix.