

Local Governments, Social Equity, and Sustainable Communities

ADVANCING SOCIAL EQUITY GOALS TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY

CASE STUDY SERIES



ADVANCING SOCIAL EQUITY
in Arlington, Virginia



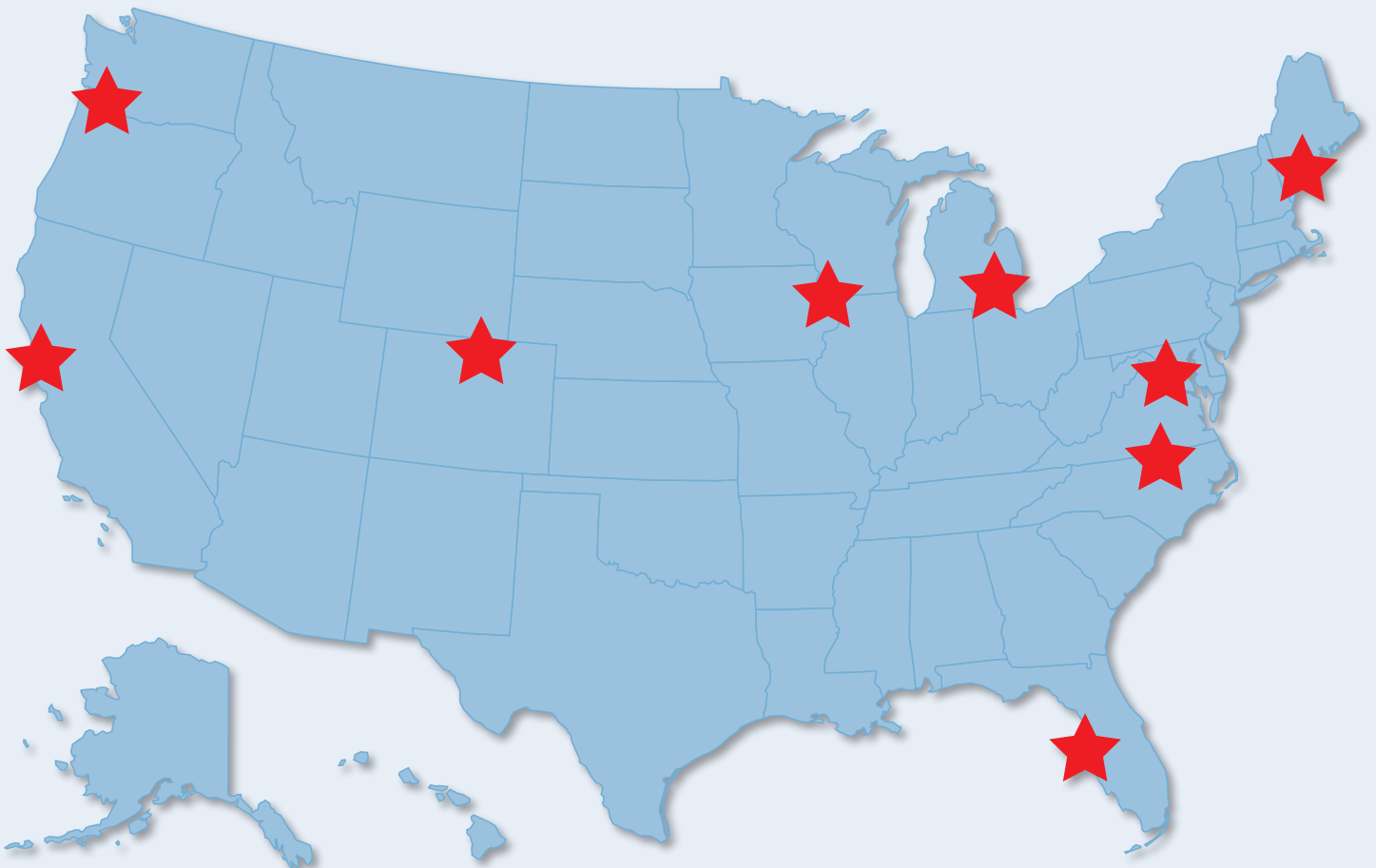
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ABOUT THIS PROJECT: ADVANCING SOCIAL EQUITY GOALS TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY

This research was conducted by ICMA and Arizona State University to identify and describe current activities, leading practices, and achievements of sustainable communities created through a comprehensive, integrated approach supported by inclusive engagement. Based on results of the ICMA Sustainability Survey in 2010, a follow-up survey was sent to 300 local governments whose original responses showed high levels of sustainability activity. Using results from the follow-up survey and primary and secondary research on leading social sustainability practices around the United States, nine communities whose responses indicated high levels of social equity-related activity were selected for case studies. Case study communities include the following:*

- Washtenaw County, MI (Pop. 344,791) and Ann Arbor, MI (Pop. 113,934)
- Dubuque, IA (Pop. 57,637)
- Hayward, CA (Pop. 144,186)
- Manatee County, FL (Pop. 322,833)
- Lewiston, ME (Pop. 36,592)
- Durham, NC (Pop. 228,330)
- Arlington, VA (Pop. 207,627)
- Clark County, WA (425,363)
- Fort Collins, CO (Pop. 143,986)

Each case study details findings from individual communities that provide insight into how they have been able to promote social equity and achieve greater social sustainability through their policies, programs, and other activities. Data was collected primarily through face-to-face interviews and secondary sources.



*Populations based on 2010 Census base.

Advancing Social Equity Goals to Achieve Sustainability: Case Study Series

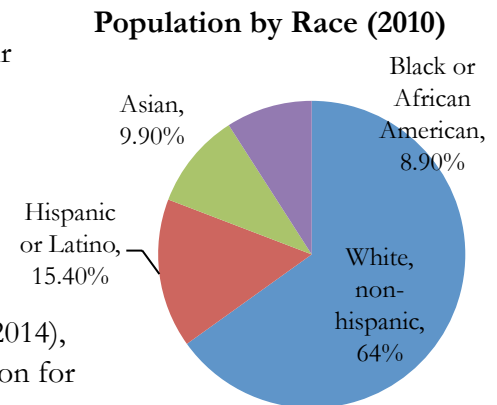
Advancing Social Equity in Arlington County, Virginia
By James Svara, Arizona State University

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Community Profile

- **Form of Government:** Council-Manager
- **County Commission:** Five councilors, including chair and vice-chair selected by board
- **Demographic Information (2012):**
 - **Total Population:** 221,275
 - **Poverty Rate:** 7.2%
- **Annual Budget (FY2013):** \$1.09 billion General Fund budget (FY 2014), which includes a transfer to Arlington public schools of \$415.7 million for a net county budget of \$674.3 million
- **Sustainability Annual Budget:** No specific budget allocated for sustainability. Arlington views sustainability as part of the way the county operates. Responsibility for various aspects of sustainability is decentralized.
- **Sustainability Plans and Strategies:**
 - Vision for County: "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."—*Arlington County Board*¹
 - Budget for FY 2014: Budget guidance from the county board to the county manager includes these elements: "fund services that protect the health and safety of our residents, continue our investments in affordable housing and environmental sustainability, adequately support the public schools, and ensure a safety net for those in need."²
- **Major Components of Sustainability Plans:**
 - Arlington's Community Energy Plan (CEP) explicitly states, "To become a sustainable community, Arlington must rethink the way it uses, generates, and distributes energy."³ The CEP sets the goal of reducing Arlington's greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 75 percent from 2007 baseline levels. Collectively, the CEP and CEP Implementation Framework constitute a comprehensive, long-term energy planning vision for Arlington and provide a framework to implement it.
 - Arlington's long-term commitment to "smart growth" includes transit-oriented and mixed-use development with emphasis on access, reduced automobile use, and affordable housing. The county offers multiple solid-waste programs that focus on maximizing recycling and minimizing waste. Storm-water management programs seek to minimize risks to property and public safety and protect streams and water quality.
 - The social goals in the county vision.
 - Arlington's Comprehensive Plan.



- Arlington’s annual Management Plan, which lists activities to be carried out during the year related to the social safety net and to environmental, economic, and fiscal sustainability.
- The mission of the county manager’s office, which includes “fostering economic and fiscal sustainability.”⁴
- **Number of Sustainability Staff:** Numerous staff work directly and indirectly on Arlington’s sustainability efforts as part of how it operates. This is also part of Arlington’s decentralized approach to sustainability.
- **Location in Government:** Sustainability and related activities are led by departmental leadership within the county, with overarching vision guided by the county board and county manager’s office with staff working on numerous programs and activities in support of its sustainability efforts.
- **Major Social Equity Activities in the Community:** Smart growth; affordable housing; increased accessibility through community design and diverse transportation options; community energy planning; solid-waste programs to maximize recycling and minimize waste; storm-water management to minimize risks to property and public safety, and protect streams and water quality; active living for all segments of the population; citizen engagement; inclusion of low-income households in energy conservation efforts; multifaceted economic development; integration of services; restoration and preservation of environmental conditions; and support for public education.

Findings in Brief

- FINDING 1 – Foresight and continuing strategic planning provide the foundation for smart growth and sustainable development.
- FINDING 2– A strong tradition of citizen involvement provides a foundation for citizen participation, but it does not preclude the periodic need to enrich and expand opportunities for engagement.
- FINDING 3 – An essential ingredient for a sustainable, diverse, and vibrant community is a broad-based commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing as well as to offsetting the displacement caused by market forces that drive up housing costs.
- FINDING 4 – Multiple and expanding forms of transportation, along with supporting community design, increase access to employment, services, and recreation while conserving resources and encouraging activity.
- FINDING 5 – Park/recreational facilities and services contribute directly and in combination with other services to community vitality.
- FINDING 6 – Outreach is important to involve lower-income residents in energy conservation efforts.
- FINDING 7 – Sustainable community prosperity is enhanced when economic development objectives are planned and implemented in a framework that is guided by strategies that encompass innovation, competitiveness, and resiliency and that links economic development to other sustainability goals.
- FINDING 8 – Education is the foundation for a viable community and schools are an important link to all residents.

History of Sustainability and Social Equity in Arlington, Virginia

Arlington County, directly across the Potomac River from and adjacent to Washington, D.C., was originally part of the land ceded by Virginia to the United States—along with land ceded by Maryland—to form the District of Columbia. The county benefited from its proximity to the national capital, especially after a trolley line was constructed linking Arlington to Washington in 1896. Still, the population of the county was less than 27,000 in 1930. The population doubled during the Depression with expansion of the federal government; it then grew dramatically during World War II with new residents from all over the country, so that it exceeded 135,000 in 1950. Growth was modest during the 1960s and declined in the 1970s. By the 1960s, Arlington was a decaying inner suburb that was losing its population and commercial base to the growing outer suburbs of Northern Virginia. When planning of the Metrorail system began in the 1960s, the county fought to route the Orange Line through the heart of one of its main business districts. With that line, completed at the end of 1979, as well as the Blue Line along the Potomac River to the Pentagon and National Airport, which opened in 1976, Arlington’s fortunes changed. Growth has continued since then, and Arlington’s 2012 population exceeded 221,000. But this growth has also posed challenges to affordable housing that could weaken its economic position or alter the character of its population.

At 26 square miles, Arlington is the nation’s geographically smallest (self-governing) county and contains no incorporated municipalities. It provides both city and county services and funds the Arlington public schools. The population is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and immigrant status; it has a lower African-American population than the state as a whole but much higher Hispanic and foreign-born populations. It has a highly educated, higher-income population compared with the rest of the state, and its poverty level is slightly lower than the statewide rate.

Arlington views sustainability as part of its overall vision to create “a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important.”⁶ It seeks to accomplish this vision and address social equity concerns by pursuing activities in the following areas:

- Smart growth
- Affordable housing

**Demographic, Socio-Economic, and Poverty Data
Arlington County and Virginia
2010 Decennial Census**

Category	Arlington	Virginia
Population white, not Hispanic*	64.0%	64.8%
African-American*	8.5%	19.3%
Hispanic*	15.1%	7.9%
Foreign-born**	23.3	11.1
Median household income**	102,459	63,636
Per capita income**	61,312	33,326
College graduate**	71.2%	34.7%
Individuals below poverty level**	7.1%	11.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- Increased accessibility through community design and diverse transportation options
- Community energy planning
- Solid-waste programs to maximize recycling and minimize waste
- Storm-water management to minimize risks to property and public safety, and protect streams and water quality
- Active living for all segments of the population
- Citizen engagement
- Inclusion of low-income households in energy conservation efforts
- Multifaceted economic development
- Integration of services
- Restoration and preservation of environmental conditions
- Support for public education

Findings

FINDING 1 – Foresight and continuing strategic planning provide the foundation for smart growth and sustainable development.

Arlington began using smart growth principles before they were widely recognized, and it has continued to adjust existing strategies and develop new ones as conditions change.⁶ In the 1960s, the community developed a plan to use the subway system planned for the region as a means for revitalizing its commercial district. Rather than accepting a route for the Orange Line that would use the I-66 corridor, the county pushed for locating the Metro under its main commercial corridor, with closely spaced stations between Rosslyn on the east end and Ballston on the west end. Concentrating growth on 11 percent of the land area in the county around the Metro stations, the plan promoted high-density transit-oriented development that gradually transitions into lesser-density neighborhoods with single-family houses and garden apartments. The county also committed itself to retaining and expanding affordable housing. The strategy created the foundation for population growth and economic development while preserving the environmental quality of the neighborhoods and dispersed commercial areas throughout the rest of the county and striving to protect the interests of lower-income residents.

The same approach has been taken to other challenges and transformations in the past decade. The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) proposals and decisions in 2005 to close and/or realign Department of Defense (DoD) agencies and installations throughout the country have had a greater impact on Arlington than on any other jurisdiction in the United States. The BRAC law requires that over 4 million square feet of leased office space housing approximately 17,000 jobs in Arlington be vacated. Although some research agencies of DoD have been retained,⁷ the losses are still substantial. The county's response has included a new development plan for the Crystal City–Pentagon City area adjoining the Pentagon to encourage new uses and promote diversification of its economy. The Crystal City–Pentagon City corridor is also being reinvented, with major transportation upgrades and long-range community-based planning aimed at turning the Jefferson Davis Highway into an urban boulevard lined with a more balanced mix of commercial and

residential development. Change is occurring as well along Columbia Pike, a vital east-west transportation corridor across south Arlington. Connecting Pentagon City and Skyline Plaza, two large employment centers, Columbia Pike is the most heavily traveled corridor in Northern Virginia not served by Metro. By 2040, it is expected to add another 2.2 million square feet of commercial development, as well as 7,000 jobs, 3,900 homes, and 7,300 residents. To address this expansion, community visioning is being used to develop plans based on smart growth principles to transform Columbia Pike into a vibrant Main Street that will accommodate growth while preserving its essential character.

FINDING 2 – A strong tradition of citizen involvement provides a foundation for citizen participation, but it does not preclude the periodic need to enrich and expand opportunities for engagement.

Just as smart growth has been central to the thinking about change, “the Arlington way” is a tradition based on extensive citizen participation in forums where residents could gather input and talk through decisions before they were made. A number of citizen engagement initiatives have been carried out since 2000; the latest effort began with a period of training for staff members. In 2012, Arlington introduced PLACE (Participation, Leadership and Civic Engagement), the goals of which are to expand and improve the quality of citizen participation in important county decision-making processes and to train both interested members of the public and staff in citizen participation within the realm of realistic expectations.⁸ As part of this effort, the county is committed to developing criteria for including civic engagement in staff performance reviews.

PLACE was launched with a two-day Open House in collaboration with more than two dozen business, nonprofit, and organization partners. Attendees—more than 300 individuals, community organizations, and nonprofits—put themselves on an actual three-dimensional map of Arlington and, through the discussion, began to forge new connections. They discussed how civic engagement in the county currently works and brainstormed ideas for making it more inclusive and effective, such as holding Open Door Mondays, weekly walk-in opportunities for residents to meet with county board members in locations across the county.⁹ The county also launched PLACE Space (www.arlingtonplacespace.us), a virtual town square that connects people, organizations, and businesses all over the county. The board approved a “Framework of Civic Engagement” in 2013, which sets forth the expectations for the board, the community, and staff in promoting citizen engagement and achieving the county’s vision. PLACE has examined the practices of all appointed commissions that advise county government, and it has developed training and a handbook of practices to ensure that members and the staff liaisons who assist them are engaging citizens in their work. Building on this approach, the Arlington County Board is holding 10 neighborhood town halls across Arlington this year.

FINDING 3 – An essential ingredient for a sustainable, diverse, and vibrant community is a broad-based commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing as well as to as well as offsetting the displacement caused by market forces that drive up housing costs.

As market-rate affordable housing continues to disappear, the preservation and creation of affordable housing is a top priority for the county, which seeks to ensure that a range of housing choices is available to accommodate households of all income levels, sizes, and needs. Priority is given to meeting the needs of the lowest-income households, including those with children or people who are elderly or have disabilities. Thus, county government has aggressively pursued all available avenues, including leveraging partnerships with private developers, to set aside within apartment complexes a certain number of committed affordable units (CAFs)—units built, acquired, or renovated with public funds—for low- to moderate-income households.¹⁰ CAFs are placed under agreements to remain affordable for 30- to 60-year terms, ensuring a permanent commitment to affordability. To date, Arlington has created 6,638 CAFs, representing about 15 percent of its rental housing units.

The normal process in CAF housing development is to work with a nonprofit to acquire, renovate, and rent units. In one example, the county worked with a nonprofit to add affordable and market rate housing on top of the church sanctuary it reconstructed in the heart of the Metro corridor. The partnership not only created affordable housing within walking distance of a Metro stop but also ensured the survival of a key child care facility.

Arlington County's main financing source for the development of affordable housing is the Affordable Housing Investment Fund (AHIF). Established in 1988 as a revolving loan fund, AHIF provides low-interest, secondary loans as an incentive for developers to provide affordable housing.¹¹ It has been used with other financing sources for acquisition, rehabilitation, and/or development of affordable multifamily units; specialized housing for the elderly, the homeless, or persons with disabilities; and affordable home ownership opportunities. The Arlington County Board allocates funds annually, and AHIF is also supported by loan repayments and developer contributions. Loans made since 2000 total over \$200 million. The fund also subsidizes moderate and substantial rehabilitation to keep affordable housing safe and efficient. With the county's high property values continuing to increase, the board added \$12.5 million in one-time funding for AHIF in the 2014 budget.

Arlington also operates a locally funded Housing Grants Program through the county Department of Social Services. The program subsidizes low-income households so that they can afford to rent in Arlington. Recipients are residents who meet income requirements and are working families with minor children, people with disabilities, or residents age 62 or older. Renters pay approximately 40 percent of their household income toward rent, and the average monthly subsidy of \$551 covers the remainder. Since 2009, total yearly distribution has increased by 65 percent, and the number of program participants has increased by 37 percent. In 2012, grants totaled over \$7.3 million and assisted 1,140 households.

An additional source of financial support for the improvement of older multifamily rental property is a Real Estate Tax Relief program. If the rehabilitation increases the assessed value for the property by 20 percent or more, the property owner is exempted from paying the additional tax that is due from the increased value. The program resulted in over \$4.5 million of forgone tax revenue in 2013.

The county uses several tools to promote affordable housing. Planning is supported by a requirement approved by the state in 2006 that developers commit at least 5 percent of the floor area within the development to affordable units; alternatively, they can make cash contributions equivalent to 7.5 percent of the area for units placed off-site nearby and 10 percent of the area for units placed elsewhere in the county. Beyond the mandated contributions, there are also incentives for developers to increase the number of units beyond normal density limits if affordable housing is included in the project.

Affordable housing is also advanced by other planning and preservation projects. As part of its commitment to remain an inclusive community and preserve its rich diversity of residents and small business owners, the county has recently pledged to maintain all existing affordable housing along Columbia Pike, where growth and development pressures have threatened the economic, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the area. In 2009, the county assembled the Historic Resources Inventory¹² to help property owners and the county determine Arlington’s most valuable historic resources—such as its historic garden apartments and complexes, most of which were built in the housing expansion during and after World War II—and decide how best to address preservation goals and development options simultaneously. Finally, in 2012 the county initiated a housing study to assess gaps in its programs and identify potential funding strategies “to ensure the continued vibrancy and sustainability of our community for people at all income levels and stages of life.”¹³

FINDING 4 – Multiple and expanding forms of transportation, along with supporting community design, increase access to employment, services, and recreation while conserving resources and encouraging activity.

To support livable community development, Arlington invests in a strong economy, healthy neighborhoods, a sustainable environment, and a multimodal transportation system that moves more people with less traffic. In the 1960s, Arlington changed the course of its future development when it accepted Metrorail, and expanding public transportation and reducing automobile usage has continued to be a central goal. Broadened transportation options improve the environment by reducing emissions and freeing up land devoted to streets and parking lots for other uses. Because of the county’s multimodal transportation and planning efforts, its volume of street traffic has remained constant since the 1990s despite growth while its investment in transportation and infrastructure has strengthened the economy, supporting more commercial and office development.¹⁴

Transportation options also have social benefits. Reducing reliance on automobiles reduces living expenses, enabling diverse populations to live in Arlington and have a good quality of life. Many people who are transportation disadvantaged choose to live in the Rosslyn–Ballston corridor, where almost two-fifths of the residents take transit to work. The social opportunities for residents, especially those who wish to live without automobiles and elderly people who may have difficulty driving, are expanded; services and facilities within walking distance or reachable by bus or Metro, making it feasible for elderly residents to “age in place.”

To ensure that the entire county, not just the major Metrorail corridors, is served by reliable, accessible, affordable public transit, the county is planning for the next generation of transit-oriented development. One key to these new efforts is a planned streetcar system, which will offer an additional option for handling the anticipated growth. Arlington is planning two streetcar lines—one along Columbia Pike, the most heavily traveled corridor in Virginia, and the other along the Jefferson Davis corridor, between Crystal City and Pentagon City. These areas will see the bulk of population and job growth in Arlington over the next 30 years. The two lines will meet up at Pentagon City, where they will connect to the Metro. The goal is to better connect the county to the regional transit system while transforming Columbia Pike into a more transit-oriented, walkable, bikeable “Main Street” that will better serve the area’s residents, local businesses, and visitors. Another key to these efforts is an expansion of bus service, which was an important component of the revitalization of the Village at Shirlington, a former shopping center; the new bus transfer station that opened in 2008 has improved the connections between Shirlington, the Metro system, and other parts of the region.¹⁵ This is an example of the county using smart growth principles to coordinate efforts with other county and regional transportation systems and invest in providing transit options not near a Metro station.

In addition to walking and using public transit, there is expanded bicycle use and recognition of Arlington as a bike-friendly community. Residents and visitors can use Capital Bikeshare, the bikesharing program developed jointly by Arlington and Washington, D.C., in 2010.¹⁶ Arlington started with just 14 bikeshare stations in the Crystal City area; now, Bikeshare is a network of docking stations and specially built bikes offering more than 2,500 bikes at more than 300 stations. Whether they join for one day, three days, a month, or a year, members can use an electronic key or a credit card to check out a bike and then return it to any docking station. Regional expansion is also under way. Another program, BikeArlington, offers free classes that teach riders of all ages how to ride bikes safely in an increasingly urban environment; it also provides up-to-date maps that make it easy to get almost anywhere in Arlington on a bike.¹⁷ The county has an extensive network of bicycle infrastructure that includes 50 miles of off-street trails, 36 miles of bike lanes, and 78 miles of on-street bicycle routes. The promotion of bicycle use and bikesharing generally fits in with the county’s practice of providing transportation options other than single-passenger automobiles and reinforces Arlington’s efforts to encourage healthy living.

Mass transit, biking, and walking all reduce transportation costs, but because low-income residents may not have access to credit cards and therefore cannot use bike-sharing (or car-sharing) services, the county is aware of the need to make new options accessible to all residents.

FINDING 5 – Park/recreational facilities and services contribute directly and in combination with other services to community vitality.

It is customary to think of parks and recreation as contributing to the quality of life in a community by providing leisure time activities and open spaces. The Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) meets these criteria, but it performs a wide range of additional roles to advance the vitality of the community. Beyond services that are open to all, it targets three populations: preschool children, older children with after-school programs at community centers, and senior

citizens at senior centers and congregating at meal sites operated by the Office of Senior Adult Programs. In all cases, programs focus on fitness and wellness activities, arts, and healthy eating. DPR works closely with other county social services and the schools to share information about programs available to meet needs. In sports programs, it works with affiliate groups that use active outreach efforts to encourage broad participation. Outreach efforts are particularly directed to underserved populations, and the department provides fee reductions for persons of all ages with limited income.

For the past 10 years, the department has promoted fitness throughout the county, using citizen engagement methods to create a vision for its endeavors. FitArlington, along with 70 partner organizations, is a campaign to develop opportunities for and increase awareness of the benefits of physical activity, as well as to identify places and programs for residents to learn and practice new skills.¹⁸ A key goal is to promote physical wellness as a lifestyle by encouraging nutritious eating and physical activity. As leaders of FitArlington, DPR has developed physical activity standards for its programs for persons of all ages. The FitArlington initiative encourages all nonprofits and school systems to adopt comparable standards for physical activity, healthy vending, and smoke-free environments for the persons they serve. Complementing this effort, Arlington was one of 10 communities nationwide to receive a \$35,000 ACHIEVE grant from the National Recreation and Park Association in 2010. The funds from this grant and other state grants have been used to develop a Community Health Action Response Team to address chronic disease risk factors of physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.

DPR is also responsible for coordinating the Community Garden Program.¹⁹ Gardens are found in parklands and on church properties. Focusing on areas with limited access to healthy foods, the program promotes such access and includes nutrition education; volunteers through Cooperative Extension provide assistance with gardening and food preparation. In addition, the Arlington Food Assistance Center, a local nonprofit organization, has a network of over 30 gardens, some of which partner with Arlington public libraries as part of its Plot Against Hunger campaign.²⁰

Finally, the county is undertaking a major environmental restoration effort that will expand recreational opportunities. It has converted a county-owned brownfield site on the north end of Crystal City—formerly home to a concrete company and junkyard—into a new state-of-the-art aquatics, health, and fitness facility and park. Recently named a Regional Conservation Priority by the Washington Smart Growth Alliance, Long Bridge Park features three full-size, multisport, lighted, rectangular, synthetic turf athletic fields; a network of walkways; an overlook at the north end of the park with views of capital city's monuments; Wave Arbor, a public art feature by nationally recognized artist; and a three-quarter-acre rain garden that directs runoff from the park's sports fields and parking lot into a garden of native shrubs and perennials.²¹

FINDING 6 – Outreach is important to involve lower-income residents in energy conservation efforts.

In 2007, the Arlington County Board launched FreshAIRE—at that time, the Arlington Initiative to Reduce Emissions.²² FreshAIRE set the county's first goals for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG)

emissions from county buildings and operations by 10 percent from 2000 to 2012—a goal that the county met and exceeded. On June 15, 2013, the board adopted the Community Energy Plan (CEP), a comprehensive, long-term community energy planning vision for the county, together with a framework for implementing the plan.²³ The CEP sets an ambitious goal of reducing the county’s total GHG emissions in 2050 by about 75 percent from 2007 baseline levels. The CEP will build on work the county began in 1999 when it started a green building program and committed to making all new county and school system buildings comply with LEED Silver standards.

Later renamed AIRE—Arlington’s Initiative to Rethink Energy—the initiative seeks to involve the entire community. The recommendations in the CEP include improving energy efficiency of new and renovated buildings; managing building operations to reduce energy costs; deploying district energy and alternative energy sources and continuing the county’s GHG-reducing transportation programs; and reaching out to all segments of the population with the energy message. The CEP Implementation Framework provides the strategies to implement the county’s vision;²⁴ two of those strategies seek to involve lower-income residents in energy conservation. The effort is committed to “ensure equitable access to and use of energy efficiency and incentives programs for all income levels” (Strategy 5). Incentives to encourage affordable housing developers to adopt energy-efficiency technology are available through the Virginia Housing Development Authority. New incentive programs will be evaluated and promoted for use in the county.

The plan also relies on programs to encourage energy conservation and efficiency that have a track record of success (Strategy 8). Among the existing tools is Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE) Energy Efficiency Education/Arlington Energy Masters program.²⁵ The Energy Efficiency Education program promotes a more energy-efficient and sustainable community, engaging professionally trained volunteers in retrofitting, weatherization, and water conservation techniques serving low-income apartment residents. Modeled after the Master Gardener’s program, the Energy Masters program provides hands-on training in energy efficiency and weatherization techniques. Services are provided by volunteers working in teams to make energy and water-saving improvements in low-income apartments. The program includes a special apprenticeship opportunity for high school and college students.

FINDING 7 – Sustainable community prosperity is enhanced when economic development objectives are planned and implemented in a framework that is guided by strategies that encompass innovation, competitiveness, and resiliency and that links economic development to other sustainability goals.

The Arlington Economic Development Commission began in 2006 to formulate the first ever countywide economic development strategy.²⁶ Approved in 2008, the plan is based on four goals that focus on economic sustainability and place-making outcomes: (1) to “be recognized for its superior business environment which includes world-class facilities, infrastructure and systems”; (2) to “support a sustainable and flourishing economy which will contribute meaningfully to a fiscally sound and healthy community”; (3) to be “an inclusive and interconnected community that fosters an innovative and creative workforce, supported by effective workforce development programs”; and (4) to promote the enjoyment of “high quality places that ensure an exceptional quality of life

and offer amenities that are valued by residents, businesses and visitors.” A strategic initiative for the fourth goal is to “encourage distinctive urban villages” by developing the unique economic, cultural, and residential features of focal areas of the county. The urban village designs incorporate transportation accessibility and affordable housing. Thus, the plan taps into goals already discussed related to planning, housing, transportation, and leisure—goals to not only make Arlington a sustainable community but also position it for successful economic development. Plans have been or are being developed with local partners in Rosslyn, Ballston–Virginia Square, Clarendon, Columbia Pike, Crystal City, Pentagon City, and Shirlington.

FINDING 8 – Education is the foundation for a viable community, and schools are an important link to all residents.

Arlington is committed to making a major investment in its children by supporting high-quality public schools. The county provides the highest level of per pupil support in Virginia. The public schools consistently rank high in performance compared to systems nationwide. In 2013, 66 percent of high school seniors graduated with an advanced diploma, and 70 percent went on to pursue four-year college degrees. Moreover, with children from families that come from 126 countries and speak 98 languages, these schools are a major institution for integrating a racially and ethnically diverse community.

In cooperation with the Department of Human Services, Arlington’s public schools also provide a wide range of services that reach beyond the school population.²⁷ The Ready Families Program provides health screening, immunizations, and community referrals to non-English-speaking students entering Arlington public schools through the Language Services and Registration Center. Staffed by a bilingual public health nurse and clinic aide, the program strives to meet the needs of families new to the Arlington school system and, many times, new to the United States. Parent Infant Education, a family-centered program that serves children who have special needs from birth through two years of age, helps families work with their children to help those

SOCIAL EQUITY SNAPSHOT

HOW ARE THE SOCIAL EQUITY GOALS ARTICULATED?

Sustainability is part of Arlington’s vision statement. It is expressed as one of several goals along with being a community that is caring, learning, participating and respectful of each person as well as being diverse, inclusive, and secure with attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods. Social equity is advanced by several parallel goals related to diversity, inclusiveness, participation, and being a caring community that is respectful of every person, and it is incorporated in many plans and policies. The Management Plan lists activities to be carried out each year related to the social safety net and to environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and fiscal sustainability. Consideration of equality, access, and fairness are present in all of the programs described in this report. Sustainability is linked explicitly to the energy conservation goals (and equitable access is included in action plans), the economic development strategy, and the long-term management of financial resources in County government. The County does not prepare an integrated statement that describes the full range of sustainability activities and outcomes.

HOW HAS SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL EQUITY CHANGED OVER TIME (PAST TO NOW, OR LIKELY IN THE FUTURE)? SUPPORT FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS?

The support for social equity appears to be increasing. Arlington has a rich history of applying standards and developing programs that will promote the interests of all residents. There is clear support from elected officials for sustainability and for equity but often the separate goals related to each are not well integrated. Evidence for increasing support for sustainability and social equity are the expanded AIRE program, increased funding and policy support for affordable housing, new versions of smart growth, a broadened commitment to citizen engagement, continued support for the public schools, and growing and broadening transportation options.

children develop to their maximum potential. Services include individual plans for services such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and education.

The School Health Bureau, administered by the county's Public Health Division in close coordination with the public schools, staffs a clinic in every school that provides not only first aid, emergency care, and administration of medications but also immunizations, TB skin tests, and hearing and vision screening. It also offers case management services, including assistance to children with complex medical needs, education of parents and caregivers, and linkage to community providers and resources, as well as coordination with Special Education and Mental Health. The bureau's Health Education Committee, comprising nurses and health aides, provides educational resources to promote the health of students and their families, both in school and at home. For example, it has launched a health initiative to encourage families to eat at least five meals together as a family to promote the developmental needs of children as well as nutrition and family bonding.

Finally, other county departments provide a number of social and recreational services through the schools.

Challenges, Advantages, and Future Plans

- Smart growth is being pursued in an increasingly competitive setting in the region. Other jurisdictions are adopting some of the practices that have made Arlington distinctive (related to Findings 1 and 2).
- The commitment to inclusion and affordable housing is impressive, but market forces may make it increasingly difficult to provide viable opportunities to low-income families. Relatively less expensive housing is not the same as low-cost housing (related to Finding 3).
- The integration of initiatives and services is an important advantage and highlights the benefits of having a single government that is responsible for city and county functions (related to all findings).
- The housing study in progress, expanded forms of public transit, inclusive approaches to energy conservation, revitalization plans for multiple commercial/neighborhood centers, and focused effort on the innovative economy are important ventures going forward that offer promise to renew and expand Arlington's commitment to be a sustainable, inclusive, and vital community.

List of Study Participants

The author of this report conducted interviews with 14 individuals familiar with social equity–related activities in Arlington County. The author wishes to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

- [Jay Fisette](#), vice-chair, County Board
- [Libby Garvey](#), member, County Board
- [Mary Hynes](#), member, County Board, and co-leader of PLACE working group
- [Chris Zimmerman](#), member, County Board
- [Barbara Donnellan](#), county manager
- Shannon Flanagan-Watson, assistant county manager
- [David Cristeal](#), housing director
- [Bob Duffy](#), planning director, and [Bob Brosnan](#), director, Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development and former planning director
- Emma Kiendl, human resources and organization development specialist, co-leader of PLACE working group
- [Jane Rudolph](#), director, Parks and Recreation
- Laura Lazour, division chief, Parks and Recreation Cindy Richmond, deputy director, Arlington Economic Development
- Joan Kelsch, Green Building Program Manager; Richard Dooley, project manager for Community Energy Plan; and John Morrill, energy manager
- Dennis Leach, deputy director of Transportation and Development, Transportation Director

Endnotes

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