

Maureen Coffey, Democratic Nominee

Question 1 -Strategic Planning for Growth and Development

Since 2018, Arlington County has:

- changed zoning in multifamily areas so the Board can permit unlimited density for affordable housing complexes;
 - added automatic bonus density into the Zoning Code for senior housing;
 - added automatic bonus density into the Zoning Code for LEED silver and platinum construction in new buildings;
 - awarded Amazon 1.6 million square feet of bonus density and undervalued the community benefits by up to \$400 million;
 - dramatically increased the use of special GLUPs, which were supposed to be rare tools to increase density in areas without sector plans;
 - approved the Missing Middle upzoning that allowed a nearly six-fold increase in density (R5, R6, R8, R10, R20 zones, essentially eliminating single-family zoning countywide;
- At no point before making these changes to add density did the County define the capacity of CURRENT zoning (i.e. how many units can be built under by-right zoning.)

Would you agree as a new board member to publish -- before approving any new sector plans, land use or zoning amendments:

- **The projected 10-year Arlington operating budget with CURRENT zoning and land use?**
- **The demographics and median incomes that can be accommodated with maximum buildout under current land use and zoning? Would you agree to use this baseline to measure against all future zoning and land use changes before they are approved?**

I support understanding what a “full” build out of Arlington under current zoning policy would look like, and within that I think that one of the nearest term steps we need to take is to assess the useful life of our existing buildings. This would help us to understand which parcels are likely to redevelop to change the actual land use rather than theorizing about the potential land use. A building that is less than 20 years old is unlikely to be redeveloped regardless of the purpose, while a building that is reaching the end of its useful life may be an opportunity for us to work towards larger community goals.

We need a long-term plan that integrates all needed county services investments alongside housing, we should be able to (1) relate individual development projects plans to the overall plans and (2) break down the silos between housing development and infrastructure planning that lead to strain on our existing systems. This type of planning will allow us to develop specific criteria for projects supporting larger goals, such as affordability, greenspace, environmental sustainability, and community building amenities. We can operationalize this by looking across the components of our comprehensive plan to identify the many areas of overlap and begin to work towards alignment of all of our planning components.

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Question 2 - Commercial Property Vacancy

Arlington County's office vacancy rate hit 23.7% ([link](#)) this year, the highest we've ever seen. This reflects a 20-year trend; notably, the amount of vacant office space today is equal to every single square foot built here since 1999.

How would you address this problem as more leases are coming due and the work from home trend continues? Given Arlington had fewer affordable housing units in 2022 than in 2000, despite a 24% population increase, why isn't the County keeping up with other jurisdictions (Washington DC, New York City, Alexandria) that are doing more on Office-to-Residential conversions? As a Board Member, would you require County workers to come back into the office?

To address increasing office vacancy rates:

1. **Make it easier to do business in Arlington.** Our permitting process is not modernized, takes way too long, and creates unnecessary barriers. We need to empower our business ombudsman alongside Arlington Economic Development to solve problems systematically across departments. We also need to fix our permitting system and ensure that we have the technology infrastructure to adequately serve our business community.
2. **Recruit/develop businesses that fit our new lives.** We have all changed how we live and work in the last several years; our economic development strategy should recognize that. We need to develop opportunities that emphasize services, experiences, and community because these sectors are seeing growth as people seek ways to reconnect after several years of isolation. We also need investments in businesses that are critical social infrastructure, like child care and mental health services.
3. **Increase our competitiveness in the region.** If an owner is looking at recruiting and retaining employees in Arlington versus Reston they know there are different tradeoffs. They will either need to pay higher salaries to support living in Arlington or their employees live further away, reducing their quality of life and the likelihood of retaining the most competitive employees. Addressing these root issues is critical to being a good place to do business.

The County issued [administrative guidance for office to residential conversions](#) in 2020 followed by a memo in October of 2022 outlining the challenges for Arlington of office to residential conversions: limited supply of fully vacant buildings, extremely high costs, and building stock that is not well suited to shift into residential units. The NYT provided an [article with insight into the many challenges](#), and covered [what it might take to overcome them as well](#).

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Question 3 - Plan Langston Boulevard

Plan Langston Boulevard was launched in 2015; it may go to a Board vote in 2023. What was originally a plan for low-to medium density along 5 mixed use nodes has morphed into a nonsensical phased "Vision" that will lock in much higher density but leave critical gaps in the plan. (Cherrydale and East Falls Church as two of the 5 nodes are now removed!) Massing and density have escalated from early drafts, with the current vision showing 5-6 stories along most of the boulevard and leaping to 10-15 stories at the three remaining nodes, with site plans potentially increasing this even further). PLB will add 15,000 residents beyond the 23,000 who lived here in 2017, a precipitous increase that would necessitate extensive infrastructure that the plan does not satisfy.

Community engagement was complicated by Covid and engagement on other development issues (Missing Middle, VHC, Firehouse 8, Donaldson Run, etc.) And while there was strong interest in better traffic management and open space by residents, both are deferred or omitted from the current vision. The county has not explained key requirements by VDOT, which administers Langston Blvd as a major commuter and evacuation route. Nor has the County explained why the percentage of affordable housing units will *decrease* as a percent of total units, even while it uses affordable housing to justify the Rossly-level of density it is introducing outside the Metro corridors. Most important, the County has failed to square the PLB plans with the tectonic shifts in the regional and county circumstances, to wit:

- Decline in Arlington's population from 2019-2022;
- Fiscal and land constraints on ability to construct public facilities such as community centers, parks, rec, libraries, public safety facilities, and schools;
- The impact of sorely-needed office-to-residential conversions (see question 2);
- Increasing impacts of climate change;
- Decline in use of existing mass transit (see Question 5 below);
- A 5.1% apartment vacancy rate; , primarily unwanted small apartments, which PLB will add to this market;
- Missing Middle approval and potential ability to deliver the "new housing types" that PLB also promises inside the same planning area, and MM impact on existing housing stock for those earning 30-120% of area median households

Do you agree that PLB should take these planning parameters into consideration? Would you approve the plan in its current form, with current heights and densities, and the omission of Cherrydale and East Falls Church?

I feel very strongly that our planning process improve its holistic nature and ensure we're looking across a variety of planning parameters. As part of working toward that goal, the County should develop a needs assessment for services and infrastructure based on housing type - similar to the student generation rates that APS uses to predict school enrollment. These generation rates give us estimates on a per-unit basis, subdivided by type of unit, to help predict future needs. As we engage in planning – from site plan level to sector plans and beyond – we need to translate that into quantification of the infrastructure investments that need to accompany the proposed housing. I am committed to ensuring that we integrate infrastructure development alongside housing and commercial development. This includes public transit, sidewalks, and parking options but also stormwater management upgrades and public safety which should not lag behind.

Additionally, while PLB is an important planning tool it will continue to be shaped in implementation by market forces, actual site planning, and continued changes to how we live our lives. I anticipate evaluating each site plan proposal to ensure that it adheres with our larger community goals – some of which will be encapsulated by PLB, but others which go beyond any single plan. PLB proposes to include nearly 1,200 committed affordable housing units by 2040 which we sorely need in our community but does still fulfill the need captured in our Affordable Housing Master Plan. I do think that we need to find a way to integrate Cherrydale and East Falls Church as implementation of their area plans has been stalled.

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Question 4 - Missing Middle of Enhanced Housing Options

Arlington residents are challenging the County's EHO/ Missing Middle upzoning in court.

If the court overturns or stays EHO programs, what would you do? What specific changes in process or substance would you promote? Do you believe the current county tracking system is adequate to judge whether stated goals are achieved? How will you define "success" of EHO if it continues in current form?

Arlington should comply with all decisions from the courts.

At this time, I think the most crucial step for the County to take is to monitor and collect data in order to assess the impacts across many outcomes over time. I see several forms of success across different types of outcomes:

1. Increasing the stock of housing
 - a. Track by the net gain in new units produced on lots granted a permit under the expanded housing options ordinance.
 - b. Success would mean having more units added in total.
2. Creating options for higher-income renters to progress on the housing ladder and stop competing with moderate income renters
 - a. Track by proxy through rent inflation
 - b. Success would mean a slower rate of increase year over year relative to our base year (2023).
3. Diversify the types of new build housing in Arlington
 - a. Track by the proportion of each category of housing across Arlington
 - b. Success would be increasing the proportion of housing in the duplex, townhouse, and other mid-density categories.

The current tracking system could be improved – I would like to see more information on the plans and submissions, and think that a GIS map component would be a helpful tool as well. I am open to adding additional components that people express a desire to have.

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Question 5 - Metro Funding Crisis

Much of Arlington’s growth and development paradigm has rested on our two Metro corridors. Pre-COVID, ridership at Arlington’s Metro stations declined 20% from 2012-2018 (chart below), even as County population rose 7% (mainly near Metro). Since 2019, daily ridership is down 45%. Metro now faces a \$750 million deficit.

What steps must Arlington take -- with other jurisdictions or alone -- to help fix this funding gap? How does your vision for Arlington take into account the long-term decline of Metro ridership in the County?

Metro has been and will continue to be imperative for the economic success of Arlington and for our environmental sustainability. In the most recently available month of data, August 2023, daily ridership for Arlington’s metro stops has increased 43% from August of 2022 (chart below). We need to work with the other jurisdictions in our region, with state government, and with WMATA to get on to a sustainable funding path that leaves us in good shape while taking into account the cultural changes around work/commutes.

People want transit that is safe and reliable but Metro, due to underfunding and the need for significant capital investment projects, has lost the trust of many riders. Earning that trust back is important as we continue to center transit-oriented development within Arlington and the region.

Rail Ridership Year-over-Year Change

Change in Entries by Station

Station	Avg Daily Entries (This Year)	Avg Daily Entries (Last Year)	Change in Entries (%)
Arlington Cemetery	978	869	12%
Ballston-MU	4,708	3,212	47%
Clarendon	2,468	1,651	49%
Court House	3,156	2,018	56%
Crystal City	4,243	3,304	28%
East Falls Church	2,123	1,561	36%
Pentagon	5,801	4,015	44%
Pentagon City	6,576	4,382	50%
Rosslyn	6,045	4,222	43%
Virginia Sq-GMU	1,761	1,237	42%
Grand Total	37,859	26,471	43%

Date This Year

Service Type This Year

All

Time Period

All

Holiday This Year

No

Holiday Last Year

No

Station

Multiple values

Summary	Avg Entries This Year	Avg Entries Last Year	Change in Entries
	37,859	26,471	43%

Showing Data from 8/1/2023 to 8/31/2023

Note: Change in entries is the change in number of entries from last year to this year.