

Question 3: County Advisory Commissions

The County Board appoints resident volunteer members to dozens of County advisory boards and commissions, including commissions related to planning, joint facilities planning, housing, transportation, natural resources, urban forestry and more. Some critics believe the commissions are mere rubber stamps for the County Board while others believe that the Board too often ignores their input. Most residents agree the commissions do not reflect the full diversity of our populace.

What do you see as the value of these commissions? Would you support a reform to have one commission per Comp Plan Element only?

How would you leverage these bodies to help shape and/or advance your policy goals if elected?

What commissioner characteristics or traits would you look for in considering appointments?

Are there administrative improvements you could propose for the commissions (e.g., term limits, service on only one commission at a time, no service on Business Improvement Districts or on boards of non-profits that accept funds from the county) at same time as commissions, new methods to engage different socioeconomic groups?)

Candidate Granger Response to Question 3:

Commissions and advisory boards are a valuable vehicle for helping more perspectives shape Arlington's policies and inform its decisions. As a member of the county board, I would encourage diverse perspectives on these commissions, even when they disagree with my opinion or challenge my viewpoint. I've heard many refer to an echo chamber that often exists within Arlington's political leadership and I would strive to change that. Diverse perspectives can make it harder to get things done because they necessitate more compromise, but I think this is a worthwhile tradeoff because the resulting recommendations are stronger.

I believe we should do an inventory of existing commissions and advisory groups to assess which ones are still needed and still functional. Those that are not providing real value to the county should be dissolved to recoup the costs of supporting them. I would support a reform to have one commission per element of the Comprehensive Plan if we also maintained the flexibility to create additional temporary task force-type groups as needed. These groups would have a clear objective and a set end date.

I would support restrictions on these commissions that eliminated potential conflicts of interest, such as no service on Business Improvement Districts or boards of non-profits that accept county funds.

Candidate Spain Response to Question 3:

Across Arlington's 50 Advisory Groups and Commissions, community volunteers advise the County and offer high-value input on various efforts. From the Commission on the Status of Women to the Disability Advisory Commission, these groups provide essential perspectives that supplement the County Board and staff. Good government must work collaboratively, and such groups are a strong example of collaboration. That said, I agree with the need to continue diversifying the groups to make them more representative of Arlington residents. I am open to discussing a review of the commissions and adjusting as needed, but I am not currently inclined to limit them to be only aligned with Comp Plan elements.

As your next county board member, I will look to these bodies as partners I can receive input and feedback from and collaborate with to advance the County's policy goals. When appointing commissioners, I would look for professional and lived experience and skill in the subject matter, enthusiasm to support improving Arlington, and an innovative, inclusive mindset. Regarding administrative improvements for the commissions, I trust that they best handle such reforms. However, I support term limits, inclusive processes, robust community engagement, and mitigating conflicts of interest to uphold the County's integrity.

Candidate Fierro Response to Question 3:

Commissions are very valuable in providing the County Board with different perspectives on issues that staff may not have considered. Effective commissions should represent the diversity of the County's citizens, but more importantly it needs diversity of thought. However, too often in Arlington commissioners are appointed more for racial or demographic diversity will little thought on having diversity of thought. This results in monochrome recommendations back to the County Board. If elected to the Board, I would vigorously recruit new commissioners who have different perspectives to ensure that there is healthy discussion on issues by the commission prior to recommendations being submitted to the County Board.

The County presently has 13 Comprehensive Elements such as Affordable Housing and the General Lan Use Plan (GLUP). Having separate commissions for each element would be too unyielding. Instead, the Planning Commission should more clearly be charged to ensure that the impact of changes to one element are addressed in the other elements. For example, the changes proposed in the GULP for EHO initiative should address the impact on other Comp elements such as stormwater. The lack of impact analysis on other elements is one of the reasons the County lost in the recent ruling concerning EHO.

I would consider administrative improvements for the commissions such as term limits, service on only one commission at a time, no service on Business Improvement Districts or on boards of non-profits that accept funds from the county). I would also recommend aggressive outreach

especially to different socioeconomic groups, with an emphasis of finding more diversity of thought. Likewise, staff need to be given guidance on not undermining different perspectives nor should they be developing policies or position papers based only on their ideology.

The biggest administrative improvement would be on how the Board treats individual members of commissions. The County Board recently committed a misstep by firing in its entirety the Human Relations Commission. Even though the Commission crossed a line by writing directly to the Federal government without consulting with County Board, firing the entire commission feeds the narrative that the County Board does not listen. A cooling off period of one month, such as recommended by Board member Susan Cunningham would have been the better option.

Candidate Clement Response to Question 3:

The County website indicates County Board has no less than 50 commissions and advisory groups.

<https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Commissions-and-Advisory-Groups>

As a member of the Transportation Commission from 2018 to 2021, I can attest to the fact that it operated as rubber stamp. Views contrary to those of County staff were not welcome; and the unspoken watch word of anyone who wanted to get reappointed was to “go along to get along” with the chair, the staff and the Board’s liaison to the commission.

County Board’s recent decision to dissolve the Human Rights Commission and rewrite its charter to eliminate any semblance of independence from the Board underscores the need for subservience on the part of commission members. While this serves the Board and staff, it ill serves the public.

Given the current mindset of the Board, the only thing that can be done to limit the damage is to limit the number of individuals willing to serve as rubber stamps. Thus, I agree that the number of advisory groups should be limited to those areas of interest outlined in the comprehensive plan.

Election of candidates like me who are not rubber stamps will discourage appointment of rubber stamps to boards and commissions.