

NEIGHBORHOOD COMPLETE STREETS PROGRAM GUIDE
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INTRODUCTION

This Neighborhood Complete Streets (“NCS”) Program Guide describes the implementation of Arlington’s “Complete Streets” policy in Arlington’s residential neighborhoods. From 2007 – 2011, the County Board adopted various components of the County’s Master Transportation Plan (“MTP”). The MTP “Goals and Policies” element adopted November 13, 2007,¹ emphasizes “Complete Streets” as a central objective of the MTP. The Goals and Policies element states that “Arlington’s policy is to use existing rights-of-way more efficiently through: integration of transportation and land use, and more effective integration and balancing of travel modes through the implementation of Complete Streets and [Transportation Demand Management/Transportation System Management].”²

What is a Complete Street? It is “a street designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations.”³

What does a Complete Street look like? There is no single description for a Complete Street. Each is designed to fit its particular community’s needs. A Complete Street “may include: sidewalks, bike lanes (or wide paved shoulders), special bus lanes, comfortable and accessible public transportation stops, frequent and safe crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, narrower travel lanes, roundabouts, and more.”⁴

Arlington currently is developing Complete Streets projects on Columbia Pike and other arterial streets to improve safety and access for pedestrians, transit riders, and bicyclists on non-commercial arterial streets as well as to improve street aesthetics, storm water management, and bio-retention. This Program Guide addresses the application of these policies to neighborhood streets.

Chapter 1 of this Program Guide discusses the objectives and policies of the NCS Program. Chapter 2 discusses the implementation of the Program, including the process for developing and

¹ Master Transportation Plan, Goals and Policies Summary, adopted November 11, 2007 (“Goals and Policies”). This document can be accessed on the County Government’s website under Department of Environmental Services/Projects and Planning/Capital Projects. <http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/environmentalservices/dot/planning>

² Goals and Policies at p. 4.

³ <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/complete-streets-fundamentals/complete-streets-faq>

⁴ *Ibid.*

recommending NCS projects for consideration by the County Board.

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM ELEMENTS

A Complete Streets policy “ensures that transportation planners and engineers consistently design and operate the entire roadway with all users in mind – including bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and their riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.”⁵ Hundreds of communities across the United States have adopted Complete Streets policies.⁶ Consistent with this evolving community-support approach, Arlington’s Complete Streets policy “is a commitment that all future transportation projects will take into account the needs of everyone using the road. Implementation of that policy is where the work truly begins. The day-to-day decisions a transportation agency and community leaders make in funding, planning, design, maintenance and operations should be aligned to the goals of that adopted policy document.”⁷

As Arlington’s population continues to grow, transportation needs will grow as well.⁸ The 2011 Master Transportation Plan-Streets Element (“MTP-SE”) establishes a goal of accommodating projected transportation demand as of 2030 while limiting motor vehicle traffic growth to a five percent increase over 2005 levels. Achieving those goals will require substantial decreases in automobile travel as a percentage of the overall transportation mix, principally through enhanced public transit as well as increased carpooling, walking and bicycling.⁹

To enable greater use of non-automobile transportation, Arlington’s street network must become more accommodating of alternative modes of transportation.¹⁰ Arlington is committed to the safety and livability of its multi-functioning streets. Reflecting that commitment, the MTP-SE includes the Complete Streets policy in the design of streets in residential neighborhoods, as well as arterial streets that traverse residential neighborhoods.

Complete Streets accommodate the transportation needs of all surface-transportation users, motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians; they are also designed to support the type and character of planned/existing adjacent land uses. Complete Streets also promote environmental quality, enhance community identity and values, and respect historic resources, including

⁵ <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets>.

⁶ Smart Growth America (“SGA”) and the Complete Streets Coalition (“NCSC”), “The Best Complete Streets Policies of 2012,” (“Best 2012 CS Policies”) at p. 3.

⁷ <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/implementation>.

⁸ Arlington Master Transportation Plan - Streets Element adopted February 12, 2011 (“MTP-SE”) at p. 8.

⁹ *Id.*, at 8; See also, Arlington Master Transportation Plan - Pedestrian Element –July 2008, at p. 22; SGA and NCSC, Best 2012 CS Policies,” at p. 5.

¹⁰ Arlington Master Transportation Plan - Pedestrian Element –July 2008, at p. 22.

neighborhoods and commercial areas. To understand the concept of Complete Streets, it is important to think beyond the roadway itself to its overall encompassing environment and potential uses.¹¹

Arlington has applied the underlying principles of Complete Streets in various County programs prior to formal adoption of the Complete Streets policy in the MTP. For example, programs such as the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTC);¹² the Car-Free Diet; the Predictable, Alert and Lawful (PAL) initiative; Walk Arlington; and Bike Arlington, among others, all have elements that are included in the Complete Streets policy.

Neighborhood streets also provide internal connectivity within neighborhoods and link neighborhoods within the County. County policy seeks to maintain and enhance a grid-style street network, in part by facilitating creation, realignment or relocation of existing streets as appropriate, and avoiding permanent closures or other reductions in street connectivity.¹³

The NCS Program will have responsibility for (1) selecting streets for development of Complete Streets projects; (2) providing guidance to County Staff in the development of those projects; (3) facilitating communication between County Staff, project stakeholders and other interests, such as residents, neighborhood civic associations, and advisory groups in the development of projects; and (4) recommending those projects to the County Board for funding.

In connection with its adoption of the NCS Program, the County Board established a new citizen advisory group, the Neighborhood Complete Streets Commission ("NCSC"). The NCSC will (1) participate with County Staff and interested stakeholders in the selection, development, approval and implementation of NCS Projects, (2) make funding recommendations to the Board regarding particular NCS projects, and (3) participate with County Staff in developing neighborhood traffic safety education programs. The NCSC will also advise the Board with respect to the adoption, implementation and review of the NCS Program, as well as recommending new policies and strategies based on NCS Program experience and evolving best practices in other jurisdictions.

¹¹ MTP-SE at p. 3.

¹² The County initiated the NTC Program In 1999, with the central goal of changing driver behavior and the culture of neighborhood street use from "cars first" to "people first." The program relies on road modifications to slow traffic, including traffic circles, raised crosswalks, speed humps, turning and truck restrictions, and "nubs" (curb extensions) to address this goal. To date, Arlington has completed NTC projects on more than 70 streets. After-project studies have confirmed the traffic calming contribution to the Complete Streets purpose. The Arlington County Board eliminated funding for the NTC Program effective July 1, 2013, with the intention that the NTC Program "will be incorporated into the County's Complete Streets Program" with an expanded scope for the current Neighborhood Traffic Calming Committee (NTCC).

¹³ MTP-SE at p. 6.

The NCSC shall carry out the following functions:

1. Provide advice and input to the County Board and County Staff with respect to developing the NCS Program processes to be adopted by the County Board, including project selection criteria, project prioritization, public outreach to encourage participation, and public traffic safety education.
2. Provide advice to County Staff in connection with implementing the NCS Program processes approved by the Board, including calls for new projects, and ongoing advice regarding developing and implementing NCS projects.
3. Participate with County Staff in administrating the ranking system used by the NCS program to prioritize potential neighborhood complete streets projects.
4. Make funding recommendations to the County Board regarding proposed NCS Projects.
5. Participate with County Staff in developing neighborhood traffic safety education programs such as the PAL (Predictable/Alert/Lawful) program.
6. Recommend new policies and strategies to the County Board based on NCS Program experience and evolving best practices in other jurisdictions.

This NCS Program Guide provides criteria and a process for identifying safety and livability problems. The Guide also includes a range of strategies to address problems, such as completion of missing elements of the residential street infrastructure to enhance pedestrian, bicycle and motor vehicle safety and convenience. The program will also promote education, safety and enforcement campaigns along with a new, enhanced delivery process. The NCS Program will incorporate traffic calming, but as part of a broader approach to street design, in place of the previous NTC Program. Thus, the NCS Program will continue to address speeding problems on neighborhood streets, in part through use of the “toolbox” approved by the County under the former NTC Program. However, the NCS Program will consider broader concerns, criteria and approaches.

Program Goals:

The NCS Program is intended to (1) make streets safe for all users of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and other users¹⁴ and (2) preserve or enhance

¹⁴ “As public funding and private redevelopment provide opportunities, those streets should be upgraded to provide essential street functions such as safe and convenient access for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, emergency vehicles, and proper storm water management.” MTP-SE, at p. 32.

neighborhood character and desired community attributes.¹⁵

The NCS Program Goals are derived from the MTP (MTP-SE, p. 2):

- Construct and manage streets to be Complete Streets. Streets should be safe and comfortable for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, motorists and other users.
- Provide safe and convenient access on all streets.
- Minimize rates of injuries and accidents for each mode of transportation with a goal that transit riders, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists feel safe and comfortable at all times when traveling in Arlington.
- Improved access, safety and livability in residential areas.
- Support compliance with traffic laws while minimizing reliance on police resources.
- Address residential traffic problems in a fair, consistent and comprehensive manner through application of uniform objective criteria.

The NCS Program implementation will be coordinated with other County Complete Streets programs to accomplish the objectives of the MTP. The NCSC will receive guidance from the County Board through a Board liaison and via the project approval and funding process.

CHAPTER II: NEIGHBORHOOD COMPLETE STREETS PROCESS

The NCS process will include the following procedural steps:

- County Staff receives requests and complaints, and evaluates and ranks streets for NCS Program consideration
- NCSC select street(s) for developing projects based on the ranking and the availability of adequate financial and Staff resources
- NCS Staff communicates identified problems and preliminary range of potential project elements with stakeholders;
- NCS Staff, NCSC and stakeholders consider viable mitigation alternatives and determination of project limits and elements
- NCS Staff, the NCSC and stakeholders determine final proposed project elements
- NCS Staff and NCSC define scope and process for stakeholder approval, if applicable
- NCSC holds public funding hearing
- NCSC submits recommendations to the County Board for funding and construction
- County Staff finalizes project design and engineering
- Project construction, including communication with stakeholders
- NCSC and NCS Staff conduct post-implementation operational evaluation

¹⁵ "Preservation or enhancement of neighborhood character and desired community attributes should also be primary considerations in developing street projects." MTP-SE, at p. 27.

In July 2014, the County Board approved and incorporated certain elements of the former NTC Program into the NCS Program.¹⁶ The NTCC was tasked with developing the NCS Program, which will include traffic calming as a strategy. Thus, the new NCSC is the successor to the former NTCC.

The NCS program will focus on improved walking connectivity, upgrade of street crossings, (particularly within school walking zones), and modifying incomplete streets with an aim at changing motorist behavior to manage vehicular speeds and minimize vehicle/pedestrian conflicts. This new program is intended to enhance the delivery/construction of sidewalk, curb, gutter, on-street parking, bus stops, landscaping, bio-retention, street lights, and drainage and curb ramp facilities on neighborhood streets within Arlington. The NCS program is also intended to improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in residential neighborhoods, improve traveler safety and convenience, and provide for local access to residences and community resources. The general process outlined below is intended to accomplish these objectives.

The first step in the process will be to identify and evaluate neighborhood streets for program eligibility, and to assign those streets a ranking score to determine the priority in which they will be selected for project development. The NCSC, working with County Staff, has established specific, objective criteria and a point system for determining eligibility for the program and for ranking eligible streets for project development and funding. These criteria and points are set forth in Appendix A to this Program Guide. Problems such as missing, incomplete or inadequate sidewalks and street crossings, inadequate lighting, documented traffic speeding and other safety problems will determine whether a street is eligible for the NCS Program. More general characteristics of the street, including pedestrian and bicycle use, traffic volume and development density, will also be scored for streets that meet the eligibility criteria. The combined eligibility and general characteristics scores will be combined to rank streets for project development and funding. The NCS Program will generally develop projects in order of ranking score, with the highest-score streets considered first.

The NCS Program process anticipates that requests will vary considerably in complexity and scope. Consequently, the specific process for development of each project will be tailored to the circumstances of that project. This Chapter sets forth in general terms the steps that such a project would ordinarily follow. The principal objectives of the process are to ensure that (1) safety issues have primacy; (2) evaluations and project rankings are based on objective criteria; (3) verifiable factual information supports all projects; (4) all affected stakeholders are made aware of potential projects and have an opportunity to provide input during project development; and (5) NCS resources are distributed throughout the County through a problem-severity ranking system based on consistently applied, objective criteria.

In developing projects, the NCS Program will coordinate when appropriate with complementary programs, such as the Safe Routes to School program, BIKE Arlington, WALK Arlington, and Street

¹⁶ The Board included in the NCS Program the definition of a “speeding problem” as defined in the NTC Program Manual, as well as the speed hump criteria.

Lighting. In addition, the NCS Program will work with appropriate County offices to disseminate information to the public regarding the NCS Program.

1. Project Initiation

Requests for evaluation of a particular neighborhood street for the Complete Streets Program can be initiated in a variety of ways. Residents can petition the Department of Environmental Services Staff to evaluate a street for an NCS project. Alternatively, a civic association or a Board- or Manager-appointed advisory group may request a street evaluation. In addition, County Staff could initiate a project request based on, for example, the anticipated impact of construction of a new school. In addition, County Staff will issue a public call for potential project locations. These locations will then be investigated by staff for applicability to the NCS program. If applicable, staff will identify a preliminary project area and scope in order to rank all potential projects. The ranking of potential projects will be posted on the County's website.

Project scopes will vary. A project could involve one or a few contiguous blocks of a street. Alternatively, a project could be limited to a single intersection with poor sight-lines, unclear pedestrian crossing areas or continual problems with stop sign running.

2. Project Prioritization

A numerical scoring system has been developed to prioritize Complete Streets requests for development. Each street for which a request has been submitted will be evaluated and scored by County Staff. The assigned score will affect the order of priority in which the street will be considered for project development and funding.

The scoring system is based on criteria relevant to the objectives of complete streets. Thus, such factors as traffic volume, pedestrian facilities (e.g., sidewalks, sidewalk widths and condition), bicycle access, and traffic safety (speeding, sight lines) will be evaluated. Appendix A sets forth the point system used to score project requests.

Streets will be ranked in accordance with the numerical score. The NCSC will select streets from the list for project development based on the availability of capital funding and Staff resources.¹⁷

3. Project Development

NCS Staff will coordinate project development in consultation with appropriate County Staff from other affected County programs, including emergency responders. The NCSC will monitor ongoing project status, and some individual NCS members will participate in the community engagement process. Policy guidance in adopted County plans, in particular the Master

¹⁷ If the Police, the Fire Department, or DES personnel believe that a particular street condition presents a danger to the public, and a street design change is needed to eliminate or mitigate the danger, the NCS can recommend to the Board that a project be approved without a prior engagement process. In such cases, construction would proceed with advance notice to the neighborhood and consultation only to the extent consistent with the urgency of the situation.

Transportation Plan and Neighborhood Conservation plans, will be considered along with the physical characteristics of the neighborhood when designing the projects.

4. Community Engagement

Community participation at appropriate points during the course of an NCS project will be integral to the success of the overall NCS program.

Considering that project size, scope, complexity, and proposed elements will vary, it will be necessary to customize the public participation process for each project. Projects will be selected to move forward to plan development at an NCSC meeting, which are open to the public. At this point, staff will create a public participation process plan for each project selected, which will be reviewed by the NCSC.

The goal of the plan is to identify the anticipated process to be followed during the progress of the project in order to *consult* with community stakeholders. This consultation will consist of obtaining community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. The community can expect to be kept *informed*, for their concerns to be *heard and acknowledged*, and to receive information on how public input *influenced* the final decision/outcomes for the project. Community stakeholders involved in the consultation would include but not be limited to: immediate project area residents, external area residents, current and future users of the street and project amenities, businesses, local community activity centers, the commercial sector, non-profits, visitors (not applicable to all projects), other County departments, etc.

At a minimum, the public participation process plan shall include:

- Approximate project location
- Identification of community stakeholders/stakeholder groups
- Identification of the public process to be used to *consult* with community stakeholders in project design aspects; identify the points in the project when the community will be consulted with or notified regarding the project
- Project timeline or estimate of length
- Identification of outreach mechanisms, methods, tactics for connecting with community stakeholders
- Identification of projected or estimated project cost, which projections or estimations shall be refined as the project evolves

5. Project Funding

Annually, or as appropriate, finalized NCS plans will be considered for funding. The NCSC will hold periodic funding sessions to formally vote on NCS project recommendations to the County Board. These meetings are also open to the public. In making a formal recommendation to the County Board to fund an NCS project, the NCSC will consider the results and feedback from the project's public engagement process, including positions taken by neighborhood civic associations and individual street users, among others, either written or presented directly during the funding

session.

The NCS Program anticipates capital funding support through a combination of Pay-Go and Bond funding for capital improvements, as well as budgeted funds for program administration. Other County programs, including the Neighborhood Conservation (NC) program, also implement Complete Streets policies on neighborhood streets. However, the NCS Program is intended to focus specifically on projects to improve neighborhood street walking and biking connectivity and street crossings, particularly within school walking zones, to manage vehicle speeds and to minimize vehicle/pedestrian conflicts that would not normally be funded through the NC program.

The activity level of the NCS Program will inevitably depend on the level of funding. In initiating and proceeding with development of individual projects, the NCSC will take into consideration whether available NCS or complementary program funding would support the potential cost of a given street project, recognizing that a precise cost project will not be possible without detailed review.

The evaluation point system discussed above is used to select projects and to prioritize projects based on objective criteria indicating need for a Complete Streets project; they are not funding points as such.

In approving a recommendation to the County Board to fund an NCS projects, the NCS will consider community input, including positions taken by neighborhood civic associations and individual street users, among others, either written or presented directly during the funding session. The support or opposition of any given individual or organization will not, however, govern the NCSC's decision whether to recommend a project to the Board.

6. Project Implementation

The NCSC will monitor the progress Staff's implementation of Board-approved NCS projects and actual versus projected project costs.

7. Project Evaluation

Before-and-after studies are important for building a base of evidence for the effectiveness of the Complete Streets Program, allowing the County to target investment in Complete Streets projects based on effectiveness. For example, the NTC Program measured changes in vehicle traffic speeds before and after implementation of traffic-calming projects.

As a project is developed, the NCSC and Staff will develop metrics that can be used to evaluate that project. "Performance measures must be closely tied to planning goals: each must measure a relevant aspect of system performance. If the goal is to increase walking and bicycling or to improve safety for these modes, then performance measures should measure these

outcomes.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Smart Growth America (“SGA”) and the Complete Streets Coalition (“NCSC”), “The Best Complete Streets Policies of 2012,” (“Best 2012 CS Policies”) at p. 56.

