

Civic Engagement Toolkit

Conversation Guide: Sample Coffee Chat (5 minutes)

The Digital Lookbook that accompanies this discussion can be viewed at: <https://slate.adobe.com/a/3Y5ry>

Thanks for meeting me today. I'm glad we have a few minutes to talk about the Community Facilities Study I am participating in. It is a joint initiative by the County and Public Schools and an important step to planning for our community's future.

Arlington is changing fast – something that I'm sure you've noticed in your day-to-day. But what everyone doesn't know, is our population is expected to grow from 216,700 to 283,000 people by 2040. Those are big numbers! Especially when you consider that we are limited to 26 square miles. A growing population means increased demands for things such as public services, community facilities and open space.

This Study is an opportunity for us to take a step back and look at the big picture. This means studying how we can maximize our facilities and resources over the next 5, 10 and 20 years. Our 23-person Study Committee and Resident Forum members, have worked since January to evaluate County and School resources, prioritize challenges and draft recommendations.

We're looking for long-term solutions to meet our community's needs. One of the most important questions we're tasked with, is what strategic community challenges are there that could threaten Arlington's overall sustainability? As a group, we've identified five key challenges that we believe are the most pressing for immediate attention. Our final reports, due in September and November of this year, will include recommendations organized around these key challenges.

The first challenge is strengthening community dialogues. Arlington has a long history of citizen-led land use planning, however civic engagement efforts still do not reach all segments of the population. Particularly hard-to-engage groups include millennials, seniors, non-English speaking populations, low-income workers and business owners. We need to rethink how we communicate and engage the whole community in more transparent planning.

The second challenge is sustaining Arlington's economic model. Arlington has a well-diversified tax base. We enjoy a 50/50 split between commercial and residential real estate taxes – which means the burden to pay for public services is evenly split. We compare favorably compared to other jurisdictions in this area. However, the local office market is changing. A shrinking federal presence, shifts in the way businesses use office space and competitiveness in the region affects these changes. We need to strategically react to downturns in the office market, because it directly affects revenues. We are currently experiencing historically high vacancy rates which result in \$34

million in lost annual tax revenue. Without solving this issue, the tax burden will shift to residential property.

A third challenge is land -- Arlington's scarcest resource. The County and Public Schools combined own 2.2 square miles for all schools, parks, police and fire stations and more. We are already experiencing increased demands for competing priorities and as we continue to grow, this gap will get larger. For example, we anticipate seeing 7,800 additional students enroll over the next 10 years. We need to carefully consider solutions such as vertical growth, shared uses and public/private partnerships.

Another challenge we identified is planning for change. Arlington is a well-recognized model for growth planning along transit corridors. This has guided significant change over the last several decades. However, our forecasted population, demographic and employment changes will affect public service delivery and facility needs. Think about the needs of Baby Boomers, ages 51-69 today, they will be leaving the workforce and their retirement may look different than previous generations. Millennials, ages 15-33 today, are our largest population cohort and will be entering the workforce and starting families. To address these shifts, County and Schools need to closely collaborate on innovative solutions to meet future needs.

Our final challenge is embracing diversity. Diversity is one of Arlington's greatest strengths, however it has been decreasing in recent years. We need to plan for neighborhoods, services and amenities for residents at all ages and stages of life. This includes new employees entering the workforce, young families who are just starting out, seniors who wish to securely age in place and hardworking, low-wage employees who deserve opportunities.

You should get involved! With issues at this scale – we all have a stake in the outcome. This affects the schools our kids attend, the parks and community centers we enjoy, even the police and fire facilities we depend on. For me, the Study's importance boils down to: will Arlington continue to be the exceptional community I want to live in?

As a resident, do you currently experience challenges related to the five I mentioned?

What considerations do you think we should be thinking about when planning for future facilities and resources?

We would love to get more of your input. Can I include you on our email list? Also, be sure to check out the information on our website at arlingtonva.us; search for "Community Facilities Study".