

Siting Principles and Process

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Background

When the County Board and School Board established the Community Facilities Study in January 2015, they tasked the Study Committee to propose “criteria and a process for siting any new County or School facilities or adding new or expanded uses to existing facilities or sites.” While many facility siting decisions made in Arlington over the last twenty years have led to successful outcomes, public facility projects are becoming more complex as the County’s population grows and available land and resources become more limited. Previous siting processes from the 1990s that guided decisions on County government facilities have become less relevant and are no longer applied consistently. There is also growing recognition of the need for creative designs and collaborative approaches to accommodate new facilities in harmony with existing programs, public spaces and natural resources.

To address these issues, the Study Committee, with input from the Resident Forum, has developed siting principles and a siting process that improves upon current practices. The siting process is intended to function as a project management tool to make siting decisions efficiently, effectively, and with ample community input.

While many of the steps and siting considerations included in the Study Committee’s recommendations are not new, this document sets forth for the first time a common set of principles and a process that can be employed by both the County and Schools. This process places a strong emphasis on civic engagement and communication with a broadly defined public. As future decisions about community facilities may be complex, those decisions at the staff and elected official levels should be made with transparency and with opportunities for public participation.

When to use the siting process

The siting process is intended to be used for County and School facility projects that require a physical location, either due to relocation or the construction of a new facility. The process could also be adapted to determine the preferred use or uses for a known site that is available for development (referred to as the *use determination process*).

The County Board, School Board, County Manager, and/or School Superintendent will initiate a siting process for a specific project on a case-by-case basis. When determining whether the siting process will be used, decision-makers should take into account the **nature** of the facility need, the **size and scale** of the facilities or sites under consideration, and the **relative impact** of the likely outcomes on the Arlington community. As this approach is anticipated to be require significant resources, particularly in terms of time and cost, it will be important to balance the level of investment in a siting process with the use of other established processes when determining when to utilize it.

It is envisioned that the siting process would typically **apply** in the following situations:

- Constructing a new County or School facility
- Relocating an existing County or School facility to a new site
- Adding new uses to an existing facility or replacement facility
- Determining the appropriate uses for County or School land (use determination process)

The siting process would typically **not apply** in the following situations. However, some of these examples would be guided by other public processes, such as a use permit application or a Public Facility Review Committee process.

- Renovating an existing facility with no change in use (e.g., maintenance capital programs)
- Expanding an existing facility or replacing with a larger facility on the same site with no change in use, including adding relocatable classrooms to a school
- Relocating uses within the County Trades Center
- Increasing capacity for County or School operations within existing buildings
- Relocating County/Schools office functions to a different office building
- Relocating programs or services to leased space
- Establishing a temporary facility or short term use that is in operation for three years or less
- Constructing or relocating a facility or public space when the location is clearly identified in a detailed long range plan, such as a Sector Plan or Comprehensive Plan element
- Determining the appropriate uses for County or School land when the site is addressed in detail in a long range plan, such as a Sector Plan or Comprehensive Plan element, or when an alternate planning process (e.g., Sector Plan, Phased Development Site Plan) has been identified for the site

Even in cases where the siting process is not applied, County and/or Schools staff are encouraged to follow the phases and steps outlined in this approach, as appropriate, with community engagement at the “inform” level of the public participation spectrum. See [Community's role in the siting process](#).

The decision to apply the siting process to a particular project should be made as early as possible after a facility need is identified to allow the process to be built into the project schedule and to ensure that the adequate staffing resources will be available. If it is determined that the siting process does not apply to a specific situation or that another process should be followed instead, that decision should be communicated to the public. It is anticipated that most siting processes would occur after a project has been identified in the County's and/or Schools' Capital Improvement Plan. The use determination process for an available public site could occur prior to a facility being identified in the Capital Improvement Plan.

Identifying and prioritizing facility needs

Prior to a siting process, it is critical that the County and Schools identify and prioritize their facility needs. Participants in a siting process will need to know the range of facility needs to make informed recommendations on multi-use facilities or sites. The Community Facilities Study Committee's final report, which will be presented to the County and School Boards in November 2015, will include recommendations for identifying and setting priorities for facility needs. These recommendations include a framework for setting public facility priorities and the establishment of a facility strategic planning committee consisting of County and School Board members, a citizen advisory commission, and a strategic staff planning group. While it is recognized that this work will not be completed in advance of the FY 2017 – FY 2026 Capital Improvement Plans, the identification and prioritization of needs should be initiated as soon as possible to facilitate future capital planning and siting processes.

Siting principles

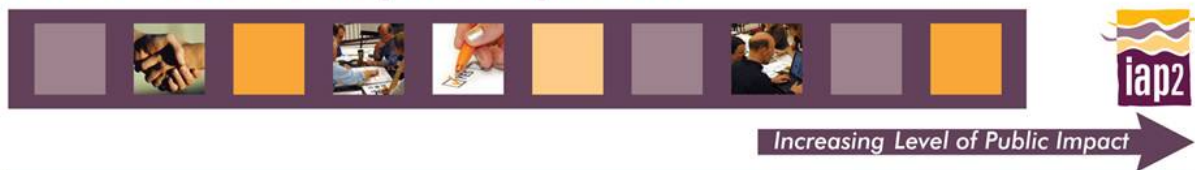
The following six principles should guide all siting processes, recommendations, and decisions.

1. Be as transparent as possible: share information broadly and communicate regularly.
2. Time and funding are limited: undertake siting processes in a timely and cost-conscious manner.
3. Use resources efficiently: explore multiple-use facilities and designs that could be adaptable over time.
4. Balance County-wide and local needs.
5. Guide discussions and decisions with established plans, policies and goals.
6. Distribute facilities equitably across the County as much as possible.

Community's role in the siting process

Arlington has a long and robust history of actively engaging the community in land use and facility planning. Public facility siting decisions should build upon this tradition of civic engagement through each phase of the process. At the outset of each project, the County Board and/or School Board should articulate the level of public participation that is expected throughout the siting process, using language from the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. In this context, *the community* and *the public* should be defined broadly, and efforts should be made to engage all interested parties and groups.

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum



	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fact sheets ■ Web sites ■ Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public comment ■ Focus groups ■ Surveys ■ Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Workshops ■ Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Citizen advisory Committees ■ Consensus-building ■ Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Citizen juries ■ Ballots ■ Delegated decision

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Since each individual process will be different, the level of public participation may vary to suit the scope of the project. In general, County and/or Schools staff will facilitate siting processes and make recommendations to the respective decision-making body, taking into consideration input and feedback collected through a civic engagement process in partnership with the community. Some steps of a process may be led or conducted entirely by staff; other steps may be led by or conducted in partnership with community members, as outlined in the evaluation framework that will be developed for each process (see Phase 1 of the Siting Process). Ongoing opportunities for dialogue between staff and the community should be built into the process. Examples include, but are not limited to, citizen working groups, established advisory boards and commissions, public forums and virtual meetings.

Information sharing is a key component of civic engagement. The County and/or Schools should commit to transparency and consistency in communicating with residents. Public information and materials should be provided early and often and should be accessible to diverse groups through a variety of channels. This includes information about the process, opportunities to participate in the process, and any decisions made as the process progresses. These channels should include existing and new platforms for communication.

While most information should be shared with the public, it is important to recognize that Virginia's Freedom of Information Act allows the County and Schools to not disclose certain information that would be relevant to a siting process. One example is discussion about real estate transactions that would affect the County's or Schools' bargaining position or negotiating strategy.

Reviewing and amending the siting process

The siting process should be considered a living document. Initial uses of the process should be considered test cases, and participants in these early projects should consider and recommend process improvements to the County and School Boards. The recommended facility strategic planning committee, consisting of County and School Board members, should review the this document periodically to ensure it is effective in guiding decisions.

Siting Process

The framework for the facility siting process consists of four phases. This process narrative describes *steps* and *outcomes* for each phase. The phases are intended to be sequential. However, the steps within each phase are not intended to be linear. Multiple steps within a phase may take place concurrently, or steps may be iterative.

This siting process can be adapted to a variety of situations. Depending on the specific circumstances of the facility project, some steps may be modified or eliminated. The process narrative generally describes the steps and outcomes for situations when a known facility requires a site. The description of each phase also includes recommendations for how the steps and outcomes could be modified for situations when new use(s) will be determined for a known site (*use determination process*).

Phases	1 Scope identified use and process	2 Identify potential sites	3 Evaluate short list of sites	4 Decision
	Determine siting requirements, additional siting considerations, and evaluation framework for Phases 2 and 3. Identify and communicate civic engagement process.	Develop a list of potential sites that meet siting requirements. Evaluate sites at a high level with considerations developed in Phase 1. Refine list to 2-3 sites for further evaluation in Phase 3.	Develop design studies/analyses for 2-3 sites selected in Phase 2. Evaluate sites at a greater level of detail with considerations developed in Phase 1. Recommend preferred site and any complementary uses.	County Board and/or School Board consider recommendations from Phase 3 and confirm a final approach for a site and use(s).

The overall process for a specific project, including timelines for major milestones, should be communicated to the public as early as possible. A status report to the decision-makers (County Board, School Board, County Manager, and/or School Superintendent) and to the community should be provided at the conclusion of each of Phases 1, 2 and 3. This status report could be a letter that summarizes the process steps, outcomes to date, key issues, and outstanding concerns.

The siting process differentiates between *identified uses* and *complementary uses*. A siting process's *identified use* is the public facility use that is most critical or has siting requirements (e.g., land area, zoning) that are the most difficult to meet. In some circumstances, the facility needs identification and prioritization process may determine that multiple uses should be sited together (e.g., a school and a community center) as a joint use facility. In these cases, the joint use facility should be considered the identified use. *Complementary uses* are uses that could be included with an identified use to maximize the efficient use of public land or to provide other colocation benefits, such as shared resources (e.g., staffing, finances, open space, parking). Complementary uses may include existing programs and uses on a potential site.

Phase 1: Scope identified use and process

Steps

- a. *Demonstrate and communicate need for identified use* – The need for the identified use will have been established through a prior process of identifying and prioritizing facility needs. At the outset of the siting process, the County and/or Schools should communicate basic information and facts about why the facility is needed. If a use is being relocated, the rationale for needing a new site should also be demonstrated and communicated.

- b. *Identify civic engagement process and communications plan* – The mechanism(s) for public participation in the siting process should be established early so that the community has an opportunity to provide input on the siting considerations, evaluation framework, and other steps in the process. This could occur by the decision-making body adopting a charge or process outline that sets forth goals, a framework for community participation (i.e., who participates and what roles), decision-making steps, and a timeline. The participants in the process may evolve throughout the phases as the sites or uses being considered are refined. The civic engagement process should make every effort to allow all interested citizens to participate prior to the County and/or School Board seeking public input in Phase 4. See [Community's role in the siting process](#) above. At a minimum, the following questions should be posed when developing the civic engagement process and communications plan.
- i. What level of public participation is expected for each step in the process?
 - ii. How and when will community input be sought, and how will this input influence recommendations and decisions?
 - iii. What communities should be encouraged to participate in the siting process, and what are their roles in the process? How will the County and/or Schools reach out to groups that are not typically represented in public processes?
 - iv. What advisory groups and commissions should be encouraged to participate in the siting process, and what is their role?
 - v. How might the public participation process change throughout the phases as the site or use options under consideration are refined?
 - vi. Who will make recommendations to the decision-makers at the end of Phase 3?
 - vii. How and when will information be shared with the broader community?
- c. *Determine siting requirements* – Siting requirements are the characteristics of a site that are required for the intended public facility to function. These requirements should be determined by the service provider and should be limited to the most critical requirements needed to meet service delivery standards. In some circumstances, one or more of the siting considerations described below could be a siting requirement (e.g., site availability).
- d. *Determine and prioritize siting considerations* – Siting considerations are the characteristics of a site that are highly desired by the service provider and other stakeholders. It may not be possible to identify a site that addresses all of the siting considerations, so it may be necessary to prioritize the considerations. Siting considerations should be identified and prioritized in Phase 1. Analysis of the siting considerations will occur in Phases 2 and 3 as specified in the evaluation framework. In addition to the major siting principles that guide the process, all projects should consider the following:
- i. *Site suitability* – Consider whether a site's physical characteristics are appropriate for the proposed use.

- ii. *Facility function and impacts* – Examples of impacts to be analyzed include economic, demographic/diversity, transportation, green space, environmental, and neighborhood-specific. Additional impacts may be identified, and impact statements should be provided consistent with the level of analysis and based on the best information available.
 - iii. *Location within the County* – The location of facilities should be consistent with efficient, effective service delivery. When considering the equitable distribution of facilities, the analysis should recognize both positive and negative potential impacts on nearby communities and the County as a whole.
 - iv. *Site availability* – The selected site for a facility should be available at a cost that meets the project’s budget or with an explanation of why an additional expenditure is necessary. The site should also be available within a time frame that meets the service delivery need.
 - v. *Cost and financing* – Rough cost estimates can facilitate comparisons between multiple site options. More complex projects (e.g., co-located facilities, public-private partnerships) can increase costs but may provide additional benefits. If possible, consider the impacts of both capital and future operating expenses, including any costs for relocating or temporarily disrupting programs or uses that exist on the site. Also consider potential funding options.
 - vi. *Existing conditions* – Establish a baseline of existing conditions, including natural and historic resources; transportation/infrastructure; government or community programs and uses; land use context; adopted regulations, plans and policies; and legal restrictions on the use of the property. The existing level of services provided on a site should be maintained or increased either on-site or at an appropriate alternative site.
 - vii. *Opportunity cost* – Consider the future opportunities for a site that would be given up if the site is selected for today’s facility need.
 - viii. *Additional considerations* – Considerations that are unique to a specific project or facility should be identified.
- e. *Develop evaluation framework* – The evaluation framework will determine how the siting requirements and considerations will be evaluated and who will evaluate them. As the process progresses from identifying potential sites, to refining those sites to a short list, to identifying a preferred site, different siting considerations would be applied. The framework may be revisited throughout the process as new information is learned. At a minimum, the following questions should be posed when developing the evaluation framework.
- i. What is the problem that this siting process seeks to address?
 - ii. What are the critical siting requirements and broad siting considerations that will be used to evaluate sites in Phase 2?
 - iii. What are the more detailed siting considerations that will be used to evaluate sites in Phase 3? These siting considerations will typically require a finer level of analysis and more County/School resources than those used in Phase 2.
 - iv. Who will perform the evaluation in Phases 2 and 3?

- v. How many options will be evaluated in phases 2 and 3?
 - vi. What communities would be affected by possible outcomes of a siting decision, and how will the potential impacts on these communities be evaluated and communicated?
 - vii. What are the barriers that could make it difficult to reach a decision, and what can be done to avoid or move past them?
 - viii. What is the timeline for the completion of each phase?
- f. *Consider potential complementary uses and partnership opportunities* – Potential complementary uses that have been identified through the needs identification and prioritization process should be considered for compatibility with the proposed identified use. Special consideration should be given to the colocation of County and School uses, which should be guided by previously adopted policies and agreements between the two Boards on jointly developing and using facilities. Private uses could also be considered; for example, a public-private partnership could be utilized to help finance the construction of a public facility or to implement other County or School plans or policies. If a partnership is being pursued, additional participants and steps will likely be necessary throughout the process.
 - g. *Outline project schedule and budget* – A generalized schedule and budget for the facility project will influence the feasibility of different site and use options and should be communicated early in the process.
 - h. *Develop siting process timeline* – The timeline for reaching a siting decision should seek to reach a conclusion in a timely manner and should fit into the overall schedule for funding and constructing the facility project. This process timeline should also be communicated early in the process.

Outcomes

- a. Common understanding of identified use and/or facility scope
- b. Siting requirements and considerations
- c. Evaluation framework
- d. Potential complementary uses and partnership opportunities
- e. Civic engagement process and communications plan
- f. Project schedule and budget for the facility project
- g. Siting process timeline
- h. Status report to decision-makers and community

Adapting Phase 1 to Use Determination Process

Phase 1 of a process for determining uses for a known site would be similar to the process described above with the following exceptions:

- a. Instead of demonstrating why a facility is needed, the County and/or Schools would demonstrate why the property is available for a new use.
- b. Instead of determining the siting requirements for an identified facility need, the known site would be analyzed to determine the significant characteristics of that site. This site analysis would be an outcome of Phase 1.
- c. The evaluation framework would determine how use options that are compatible with the site will be prioritized and who will evaluate alternative use scenarios.

Phase 2: Identify potential sites

Steps

- a. *Proceed with civic engagement process and communications plan* – The civic engagement process and communications plan developed in Phase 1 should be followed throughout the process.
- b. *List potential sites* – Potential sites that appear to meet the siting requirements should be identified and communicated. Identification of sites should include community input. If sites that do not meet the requirements are eliminated from further consideration, such decisions should be shared with the public.
- c. *Use evaluation framework to analyze sites at a broad level of detail* – As indicated in the evaluation framework, potential sites should be analyzed at an appropriate level of detail to narrow the list of sites to two or three. This evaluation would likely include all of the siting requirements and those siting considerations that do not require detailed analysis such as design studies.
- d. *Explore feasibility of complementary uses and partnerships* – Analyze the feasibility of potential complementary uses and partnership opportunities identified during Phase 1. This level of analysis should be more conceptual and should not consider the feasibility of specific sites.
- e. *Refine list of sites for further evaluation* – Using the results of the analysis of potential sites, determine two or three sites that appear to best meet the siting requirements and considerations. These sites will continue to be evaluated in Phase 3.
- f. *Confirm and revise siting process timeline if necessary* – Make every effort to keep the siting process on schedule. If additional time is needed, recognize the implications on the facility project's overall schedule and the impacts on service delivery.

Outcomes

- a. List of all sites considered, including those eliminated

- b. Analysis report of the evaluation process and recommendation of two or three sites for further evaluation in Phase 3
- c. Analysis report for complementary uses and partnership opportunities
- d. Siting process timeline
- e. Status report to decision-makers and community

Adapting Phase 2 to Use Determination Process

Phase 2 of a process for determining uses for a known site would be similar to the process described above with the following exceptions:

- a. Instead of identifying potential sites, the use determination process would list potential uses for the site. Potential uses should be consistent with previously identified public facility and open space needs. The need for these potential uses should be demonstrated.
- b. Basic site requirements for potential uses should be established to facilitate evaluation.
- c. The phasing of uses on the site, considering short term and long term needs, should be considered.
- d. A list of all uses considered for the site, included options eliminated from consideration, and a list of two or three use options for further evaluation will be outcomes of Phase 2. Use options could include one use or multiple uses.

Phase 3: Evaluate short list of sites

Steps

- a. *Proceed with civic engagement process and communications plan* – The civic engagement process and communications plan developed in Phase 1 should be followed throughout the process. Community members or groups with a specific interest in the sites chosen for detailed analysis should be notified and encouraged to participate in the process, if they are not already involved.
- b. *Develop design studies/analyses* – The design studies for the two or three sites selected for further evaluation will illustrate potential site layouts. They should provide a sufficient level of detail to facilitate analysis of local impacts (e.g., transportation, green space) and to further evaluate the feasibility of complementary uses.
- c. *Use evaluation framework to analyze sites at a finer level of detail* – As indicated in the evaluation framework, the two or three selected sites should be analyzed at a level of detail that allows a comparison of the potential impacts, costs, and benefits for each site.
- d. *Develop rough cost estimates* – Order of magnitude cost estimates should be provided for the development of the sites selected for further evaluation. Additional cost estimates for alternative site layouts or use options could also be developed if necessary. Costs estimates should consider

both capital and future operating expenses, including any costs for relocating or temporarily disrupting programs or uses that exist on the site. If complementary uses or partnerships are being considered, take into account potential cost savings. Opportunities for creative financing mechanisms could also be explored.

- e. *Refine and analyze potential complementary uses and partnerships* – Determine the feasibility of complementary uses and partnerships for each site, building upon the Phase 2 analysis.
- f. *Confirm and revise siting process timeline if necessary* – Make every effort to keep the siting process on schedule. If additional time is needed, recognize the implications on the facility project’s overall schedule and the impacts on service delivery.
- g. *Engage community prior to recommendations* – A summary of the process and analysis should be provided to stakeholders and the broader community with opportunities for input on final recommendations. This could be accomplished through a community workshop or other civic engagement tools.
- h. *Make a recommendation for a preferred site, uses and/or partnerships* – A final recommendation that takes into account the analysis and public input will be provided to the County Board and/or School Board. This recommendation should include a preferred site for the identified use, any recommendations on complementary uses and/or partnerships, and any additional guidance, such as steps to minimize impacts on site resources and existing uses. The recommendation may also include alternatives that could be supported if the preferred option cannot be implemented.

Outcomes

- a. Analysis report for evaluated sites
- b. Community review of analysis
- c. Recommendation for preferred site
- d. Recommendation for any complementary uses and/or partnerships
- e. Additional guidance on site development, including steps to minimize impacts on site resources and existing uses
- f. Siting process timeline
- g. Status report to decision-makers and community

Adapting Phase 3 to Use Determination Process

Phase 3 of a process for determining uses for a known site would be similar to the process described above with the following exceptions:

- a. Design studies and analyses for two or three use options should be developed for the site.
- b. The final recommendation will be the preferred use or uses for the site with alternative options that could be supported if the preferred option cannot be implemented.

Phase 4: County/School Board decision

Steps

- a. *Solicit public input on recommendations* – The County Board and/or School Board will provide an opportunity for public input on the final recommendations from Phase 3 prior to taking action.
- b. *Consider recommendations and act* – The County Board and/or School Board will consider the recommendations from Phase 3, take action on the recommendations, and direct the County Manager and/or Superintendent on next steps.
- c. *Initiate development review process* – After deciding to proceed with a site and use(s), the County Board and/or School Board will initiate the development review process for the project by providing guidance to the reviewing advisory group(s). Depending on the specific project being reviewed, these groups could include the Public Facilities Review Committee, the Site Plan Review Committee, the Long Range Planning Committee, and/or the Building Level Planning Committee.

Outcomes

- a. Approach for site and use(s)
- b. Guidance to advisory group(s) for development review