



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 5, 2020

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Update on the Planning Process for Arlandria and Del Ray.

ISSUE: What did we learn from the fall community listening sessions and several months of outreach in the Arlandria and Del Ray neighborhoods and how will that shape the rest of the planning process?

RECOMMENDATION: Provide feedback on the fall engagement activities and guidance on the proposed planning process.

BACKGROUND: The Department of Planning and Zoning is partnering with the Office of Housing and other City departments to update the Plans for Arlandria and Del Ray (including the [2005 Mount Vernon Avenue Business Plan](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/masterplan/City_Master_Plan_Map/MountVernonAvenueBusinessAreaPlanCurrent.pdf) [<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/masterplan/City_Master_Plan_Map/MountVernonAvenueBusinessAreaPlanCurrent.pdf>](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/masterplan/City_Master_Plan_Map/MountVernonAvenueBusinessAreaPlanCurrent.pdf) and the [2003 Arlandria Action Plan](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/masterplan/City_Master_Plan_Map/ArlandriaNeighborhoodActionPlanCurrent.pdf) [<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/masterplan/City_Master_Plan_Map/ArlandriaNeighborhoodActionPlanCurrent.pdf>](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/masterplan/City_Master_Plan_Map/ArlandriaNeighborhoodActionPlanCurrent.pdf), as shown in Attachment 6).

For the initial stage of the plan update process, staff launched a process to engage the community early to hear about their issues and concerns, and ensure that engagement was inclusive, equitable, and conducted in a variety of different formats and geographic locations. Prior to that outreach, the City reached out to stakeholders and invited community and neighborhood organizations and businesses in and around Arlandria and Del Ray to help shape fall community conversations.

Staff's proactive approach to engaging the entire community was based on a bilingual experience with all outreach and engagement done in both Spanish and English. This included the project webpage, eNews notifications, flyers, questionnaires, meetings, pop-ups, and mobile engagement. In addition to utilizing in-

house Spanish language speakers, the City hired a communications consultant with experience presenting to and engaging the Latinx community and developed community ambassadors early to ensure effective outreach.

DISCUSSION: Over the course of the fall engagement in Arlandria and Del Ray, City staff accomplished:

- 35 one-on-one meetings or presentations;
- 9 mobile pop-ups in the Arlandria and Del Ray neighborhoods;
- 2 large community conversations in Del Ray and Arlandria;
- Over 800 responses to an online questionnaire (over 620 English responses; over 230 Spanish responses); and
- Coverage in El Tiempo Latino and Univision.

Information gathered during these engagements highlighted issues of importance to community members and helped inform a framework for the rest of the planning process to ensure that it is responsive to their needs and concerns.

Through the outreach conducted in both neighborhoods, including the in-person and online questionnaire (see Attachment 1), staff heard some consistent themes. Many people value their neighborhood walkability, the calm, small town feel, and proximity to employment centers. They identified pedestrian safety, public transportation, and neighborhood amenities like retail, community activities, and parks and playgrounds as things that are most important in their neighborhood. There were also some noticeable differences in the Spanish and English language questionnaire results in terms of the top 5 most important things for respondents and their families as listed below:

Spanish Language Questionnaire

1. Housing Options and/or Affordability
2. Increasing Minimum Wage
3. Pedestrian Safety
4. Job Opportunities
5. Public Transportation

English Language Questionnaire

1. Restaurants and Stores
2. Pedestrian Safety
3. Neighborhood Safety
4. Community Activities
5. Parks and Playgrounds
- (6. Public Transportation)

Based on what was heard, staff is proposing to phase the planning process with a series of interactive community conversations on themes highlighted by the fall listening sessions (see Attachment 4).

The phased planning process would begin with a kick off to identify an overarching vision and plan goals. After establishing these, the process would focus on Housing Affordability in Arlandria, as that is the most urgent issue in the plan area based on pressing redevelopment interest in the neighborhood and pressure from

redevelopment outside the Plan area. Meetings in the spring will focus on developing a vision and supporting goals, as well as identifying specific issues, tools and strategies for addressing housing affordability in Arlandria. Staff will return to the Planning Commission and City Council in the early fall with recommendations for consideration.

Subsequently, the next phase of the planning process will focus on additional topics of importance highlighted by the communities: neighborhood character (cultural identity, historic preservation, parks and playgrounds), housing in Del Ray, mobility (pedestrian and bicycle safety, public transportation), and retail (commercial vitality, small business retention and health). This portion of the planning process will address issues in both neighborhoods and may utilize either an advisory group or a network of community ambassadors to assist with outreach and continuity of participation.

The final plan will cover the entire Mount Vernon Avenue corridor with sections or chapters devoted to particular areas as appropriate. Draft options and recommendations will be introduced in spring 2021 for discussion and refinement before posting a final draft plan for consideration and adoption in fall 2021.

Job opportunities and increasing minimum wage were also important issues identified in the Spanish language questionnaire. Although these issues are outside the scope of a land use plan, they are certainly related. Staff will work with other City departments who are engaged on this issue to address these topics and ensure that plan recommendations do not exacerbate these issues of importance.

The fall pre-planning work demonstrated that meeting the community where they are - running errands along Mount Vernon Avenue on the weekends, at recreation centers, PTA meetings, and other important community organization meetings on weekday evenings - through pop-ups and mobile engagement is the best way to involve people. Staff will continue to use this type of grassroots participation in combination with online engagement to supplement larger, in-person meetings.

Additionally, the Del Ray Citizens Association recently conducted a survey of their membership and residents of Del Ray to identify concerns relating to an update of the Mount Vernon Avenue Business Plan. An overview letter and survey results have been provided in Attachment 5.

NEXT STEPS: Staff will incorporate guidance provided by Planning Commission and City Council at the February 2020 meetings into the proposed process and start the process outlined in Attachment 4.

FISCAL IMPACT: Funding has been allocated for this project through the City's Capital Improvement Program and through a Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) grant for \$175,000.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Questionnaire Sample
2. [Engagement Video Link <https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dzy5LNCdpjaA&data=02%7C01%7Cradhika.mohan%2F>](https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dzy5LNCdpjaA&data=02%7C01%7Cradhika.mohan%2F)
3. [Matea Group Final Report <https://www.alexandriava.org/>](https://www.alexandriava.org/)
4. Proposed Plan Update Work Plan
5. Del Ray Citizens Association Letter and Survey Results
6. Existing Plans
7. Draft Planning Process

8. Presentation

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