

4MRV Working Group: Guiding Principles

(Draft #4, 4/17/17)

NOTE TO READERS: This revised draft includes all comments received from Working Group members and alternates as of March 30; additional points paraphrased from recent emails by WG members, and comments received from staff on April 3. As suggested in the 4/13 leadership group meeting, the principles have been edited and reorganized into a more coherent sequence, with similar principles combined.

Process-related principles not specific to 4MRV were removed. Please see the “Framework for Civic Relationships” table from the Participation, Leadership and Civic Engagement (PLACE) report (Dec 2012) for similar principles, which are intended to be part of all such efforts.

The purpose of this list continues to be to stimulate dialog, identify general areas of agreement, and help to clarify outstanding questions and issues. Principles that find their way into actual draft plans or reports will be reviewed and probably refined then.

A. GENERAL PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Plan for the whole valley at one time.

--- For example, if a large recreation-related facility can be built in either of the light industrial zones, this will leave more space for enhancing and protecting the flood zone and park areas. Also, trails and new stream crossings should be planned as part of networks, not isolated features. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- This principle seems to advocate for comprehensive planning in which the park and study area are treated as an integrated whole. Unfortunately, the reality is that the only land owned by and under control of the County is in the park planning area. Therefore, the group is understandably focused on what will or will not be in the park master plan. Amenities included in the park master plan are will likely be realized far sooner than amenities situated outside of the park master plan. This is a great sounding concept but it oversimplifies the reality of what we are dealing with. (Shirley B.)

--- This is supposed to be a long-term planning effort. It is important to separate out the short-term issues from the long-term planning objectives to ensure that we plan for an integrated whole. Rather than narrowing our thinking to what currently exists, we need to think about broader possibilities and interim steps that can get us there. (Caroline H.)

--- Planning for park and recreation uses outside the areas that the County owns has a good potential for raising expectations for projects that may not be achievable over the next twenty years. (David P.)

--- There needs to be an addition about respecting property owners’ rights or at least stating their positions will be included. It doesn’t seem right to consider another facility on a building that isn’t County owned. (Nora P)

--- If properly communicated, the community is certainly smart enough to understand that some parts of the plan are for the near-term and other for the long-term. Getting too-focused on what is possible in the short-term will lead to bad long-term consequences. We need to be thinking about the whole valley. (Chris S)

2. Strive to find the appropriate balance between county-wide needs and neighborhood preferences, accommodating current and anticipated future demand.

--- The Sports Commission adopted a position statement in October 2016 on planning processes to respectfully recognize varying opinions while reinforcing the notion that the entire Arlington community has primary “ownership” of public facilities. Our position states that while the inputs of immediate neighbors need to be given serious consideration, Arlington County facilities, and the planning processes that produce them, need to represent the interests of all. (Shirley B.)

--- While neighbors should not have veto power over any particular change that benefits the broader community, the plan should be widely appealing to surrounding residents and likely to be well utilized by them. (Jeff Z.)

--- Incorporate data on future demographic expectations – what will the area and the county look like in 10/20/30 years and are we planning for the long-term? (Edie W & Carrie J)

--- It should also be noted that this planning area does not have to meet/address the needs of the entire county and may not have the capacity to do so. (Staff)

3. To the greatest extent possible, seek to provide new capacity (in the valley or elsewhere) before shutting down any existing capacity.

--- Whether the affected parties are dog owners or sports groups or businesses or the arts community, the loss of current capacity would have negative implications. The group needs to be mindful of how its decisions will affect the ability of current users to conduct their activities and seek ways to mitigate that effect. (Edie W & Carrie J)

--- Agree in principle, but swing space for all functions in the county is at a premium. Specific interest groups need to remain flexible and consider other interim alternatives. (Caroline H.)

--- Compromises will be necessary given the multiple constraints on land in the planning area and the importance of incorporating elements (e.g., riparian buffers) that are currently deficient or missing altogether. (Staff)

4. Consider affordable, simple, smart solutions that can be implemented over time.

--- Many Arlington plans have authorized redevelopment at higher densities with substantial public improvements and amenities funded by developers. In this case, there is little likelihood of offering significantly increased density or more residential units in return for private investments in public infrastructure. Improvements to the streets, streetscape, park, cultural affairs facilities, etc. will have to be funded largely by the County. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- Staff provided information early in this process about vertical or transferrable development rights, which could provide additional funding that is not paid for by the County. Perhaps we need a refresher on this concept. (Shirley B.)

--- Developing a long-term plan but focusing on incremental efforts and interim steps that can be taken to implement the plan is key. We need to recognize that changes are likely to be much more organic and episodic in this planning area than elsewhere in the county where developer contributions can make things happen much more quickly. (Caroline H.)

--- Also need to recognize budget constraints that may rule out investing in the same facilities twice (once for rehab, then later for larger improvements or replacement). (Edie W.)

--- As these plans are being developed it is important to approach the process with as much creativity as possible. The focus should be on developing the best possible plan and design with phasing, cost implications, and potential funding mechanisms taken into consideration subsequent to that. (Staff)

5. Enhance the area's walkability, with attention to safety and pedestrian / bicycle connections.

--- Why limit to walkability? How about "Enhance mobility in the area, especially bicycle and pedestrian connections. Pay special attention to safely crossing barriers such as Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington Mill Drive and Four Mile Run." (Chris S.)

--- Add "bicycle connectivity". (Staff)

6. Support locally owned and operated for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations by recognizing potential impacts on their operations and identifying ways in which these plans can benefit them.

--- Terms "respect" and "support" need definition. (Staff)

--- 4MRV is a different kind of community, one where small ideas can grow big – e.g. WETA, Signature, Theater on the Run, Weenie Beanie, brewery, auto shops, and more. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- There is voluminous research noting that businesses reap tremendous economic benefits from being near a park. Rather than being threatened by the park, existing business should consider how they can benefit from close proximity to the park. (Caroline H.)

--- Build on our strengths, especially with regard to local economic development; retain and expand, or provide expansion options for, local businesses and amenities that have broad community support (Elizabeth G.)

--- Existing businesses should be assured that they are not going to be forced out as a result of this plan. It should be clear that if they don't want to sell their properties or change their operations, they can continue to function unimpeded. (Jeff Z.)

--- Plans should include improvements in public infrastructure such as sidewalks, lighting, safety, signage and general aesthetics that will benefit both businesses and the public. Businesses might also be offered incentives to improve their structures and facades. (Jeff Z.)

B. ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES

7. Preserve, protect, and rehabilitate existing mature trees, stream buffer, and wildlife habitat; strive for no net loss (or if possible, increase) in unprogrammed green space.

--- Consider extending the principles of the Alexandria-Arlington Four Mile Run Stream Restoration project above Shirlington Road bridge for the first time, especially increasing access to the stream. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- Please clarify what is included in "green space." Depending on how this were to be interpreted, the principle to "rehabilitate" could be used by some as a way to justify removing two baseball fields from the park, which would be inconsistent with the group's charge to "provide a vision for the

comprehensive replacement and realignment of existing park features...” The Sports Commission intends to strongly adhere to the concepts of “replacement and realignment” as articulated in the charge. (Shirley B.)

--- To date, there has been very little consideration of the Four Mile Run Design Guidelines. Many of the principles included in the guidelines are timeless and should provide the underpinning of improving water quality, restoring the stream bank to provide a riparian buffer and providing connection to the water. (Caroline H.)

--- Perhaps stating that the stream corridor and flood plain area will be preserved as natural area that adheres to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation regulations. (Nora P)

--- Agree with Caroline, we should be stealing shamelessly from the existing Four Mile Run Design Guidelines. I would like to see enhancing access to the stream explicitly called out as a Principle. (Chris S.)

--- Staff agrees with this general framing of the substance of the 4MR Design Guidelines This principle is very relevant to the application of the Resource Protection Area (RPA) requirements of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. Where existing RPA encroachments and impacts already exist (as is the case between Walter Reed Drive and Shirlington Road – and beyond), the target is a net improvement in the condition and width of the RPA buffer. This is especially true for County investments in park spaces and other facilities. There are strong location- and context-specific elements to this approach – but the general objective is applied across all projects. (Staff)

--- The design guidelines for the Four Mile Run project downstream are nearly a decade old and portions of them may not be viable for the 4MRV project area. Additionally, design guidelines are inherently context-driven and need to reflect the goals of each distinct effort. Each consultant team working on 4MRV has been specifically tasked with reviewing the existing design guidelines and incorporating them to the most appropriate extent possible while designing the 4MRV study area. In addition, the best planning and design options may include loss of existing green space in some areas and gain of open space in other areas. Planning requires flexibility and good design, which is difficult to do if existing footprints must be maintained at all costs. (Staff)

--- Undeveloped land is increasingly rare. It should be protected and improved as healthy natural habitat, rather than building on it and trying to reclaim equivalent space elsewhere. This is currently a gritty industrial area, with one of the lowest percentages of tree canopy in the county, much reduced from 20 years ago. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- This principle removes planning flexibility. What about a “no net loss of green space” principle instead, perhaps coupled with a “look for opportunities to add green space whenever possible.” (Shirley B.)

--- We should also consider the corollary of exploring opportunities to take down existing built areas, especially those purchased by the County for exactly that purpose, to create more open space. (Caroline H.)

--- This could be too restrictive, as some areas not currently built out could be better served by being built on, and some areas now built out could be better served by being returned to natural habitat (though that may take some years). (David P.)

--- Suggest “no net loss of green space AND retain most of the existing mature trees.” Cutting down trees and replacing with “green” ball fields would be a shame, as well as a violation of 4MR stream restoration principles. (Ginny F.)

--- Land that hasn't been impacted and built on contains SOIL and is much more valuable to flora and fauna than trying to turn impacted areas into natural resources. Studies show that it isn't a matter of years but of centuries. Much better to preserve than rehabilitate. (Nora P)

--- Too restrictive. Would prefer something else like "provide a significant net increase in green space". Location is king. Sometimes building on 30 square feet of land over here can allow you to create 300 sq feet of new green space on the next block. (Chris S)

--- This principle can be overly restrictive. In creating a park master plan, a number of goals must be balanced since space, and sometimes funding, is limited. This principle is in conflict with the objective of achieving the best overall planning for a particular area. To create the best overall park plan and area plan, we need to be able to consider shifting uses over time, some of which may include adding green space or adding built structures. If taken at face value, this statement directs us to "renovate in place" and eliminates the option of reconfiguration within the master planning area. (Staff)

8. Improve water quality management through net gains in reduction of impervious surface, more natural space, increased stormwater management.

--- Remember this is a flood plain area in a time of increased severe weather events and climate change. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- Preserving and enhancing the function of the Restoration Protection Area (stream buffer) is critical to improving water quality in Four Mile Run stream. (Ginny F.)

--- The Chesapeake Bay Preservation regulations will apply to all the land bordering the stream so any plan promoted should start with these guidelines. These are state and federal regulations that are triggered as soon as changes are planned. (Nora P)

--- The County's strong Stormwater Management Ordinance will be an important tool to implement this principle as the land in the study area redevelops. See also the RPA comment above, which will help add buffering and adsorption capacity for runoff. (Staff)

9. Buffer parking/roadways or other noise-generating uses, to the extent practicable, with trees or other attractive amenities.

--- Need to define "noise-generating space," "people-friendly space". (Staff)

--- Make the area more visually attractive for residents and visitors. Also make back-of-house and service functions less intrusive. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- This principle could be overly restrictive as well as ineffective. Trees could work well as buffers, but they are not the only method for buffering against noise. Green areas suggest open areas which might provide no noise buffers at all. The group should strive to strike a balance between aesthetically pleasing and functionally practical. (Shirley B.)

--- Trees and other vegetation can provide an effective visual and auditory barrier, and also have the added ecological functions of absorbing additional storm water, cleaning the air, providing shade and cooling the air to ameliorate the heat island effect. Research also points to the economic benefits to businesses in areas with trees and other plantings. (Caroline H.)

--- Trees are a great buffer and when carefully chosen narrow species of evergreen used for sound and view shed will be much better. Current Arlington County streetscape requires trees bordering the streets to meet stormwater and pollution standards. (Nora P)

--- Agree with a principle on buffering, but agree with Shirley that there are many ways to buffer and we shouldn't limit ourselves to trees & plants. What about an art wall? A climbing structure? Trees and plants are awesome and have many benefits, but there may be opportunities here to both include a recreational or cultural amenity and have it function as a buffer for unsightly but necessary items. (Chris S)

--- Staff agrees that this principle can be overly restrictive. In creating a park master plan, a number of goals must be balanced since space, and sometimes funding, is limited. Also, this principle runs the risk of prohibiting the best design solutions for a particular space. Moreover, it is undesirable to categorize activities and elements within these plans into "noisy" and "not noisy". This is not an accurate reflection of how public spaces function, be it parks, sidewalks, parking lots, plazas, etc. (Staff)

10. *Recognize and celebrate local history, specifically the history of Jennie Dean Park.*

C. FACILITIES PLANNING PRINCIPLES

11. *Accommodate County facility needs, as appropriate, and incorporate into the surrounding context; seek co-location opportunities.*

--- For example, can we put a bus depot together with an indoor sports facility? (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- We believe it's important to take County needs seriously. We recognize that perhaps no one wants the County bus fleet parked in their neighborhood, but having a bus fleet is important to the Arlington community and to our efforts to be a more car-free community, so we need to treat these needs with respect and not annoyance. (Shirley B.)

12. *For public facilities, co-locate and build up—not out—to the greatest extent possible; look for shared uses involving public-private partnerships.*

--- Aligns with the Community Facilities report findings for Arlington's next 20 years. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- Creative co-location and potential synergies should be explored to the maximum extent possible. We need to get away from traditional, limited thinking on land use. (Caroline H.)

--- Look for opportunities to gain space by putting parking underground or expanding existing buildings by adding new layers of commercial or recreational space, including outdoor rooftop space. (Jeff Z.)

--- For example, look for parking solutions that are neither completely private nor public, but shared, in order to facilitate commercial use by day and public use by night and weekend. Same thing with sharing of community and recreational activity spaces. (Edie W. & Carrie J.)

--- We agree with this concept but we don't think parking is the best example to illustrate what is meant. Public-private partnerships can bring in additional funds to relieve the taxpayer burden. It is entirely possible that some form of public-private partnership will be the best way to meet some of our design ideas. We would just emphasize that, in order to market such solutions, the County needs maximum flexibility to attract private funding. (Shirley B.)

--- Develop a County partnership with WETA to support its relocation and upgrading in Shirlington while freeing up more potential park space. (Mike)

--- Provide infrastructure improvements and other support for private initiatives to improve existing businesses and promote alliances between businesses and the arts. (Mike)

13. *In designing plan elements, give priority to performance over form.*

--- Staff and consultant presentations so far seem to concentrate more on outward visual appearances than on how the various elements meet the actual needs of the community, i.e. how they perform. (Keith F.)

--- This seems like it might be a subset of the point concerning multiuse facilities. I don't see the presentations as focusing on outward appearances over actual needs as it's all been at a conceptual level trying to fit in tennis courts, ball fields, dog park, etc. (Nora P.)

--- Elements within this plan are not merely for perfunctory use. Performance standards must be measured against a large number of variables and metrics. Design and infrastructure inform the performance of each element in the planning areas. Likewise, the needs of the community are highly varied; multiple stakeholders and user groups must be considered when determining the overall plan for the area.