



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

County Board Agenda Item Meeting of September 26, 2009

DATE: September 23, 2009

SUBJECT: Request to Advertise Amendments to the County Comprehensive Plan to Add a Parking and Curb Space Management Element, dated September 2009, to the Amended Master Transportation Plan (MTP).

C. M. RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the Advertisement of an Amendment to the County Comprehensive Plan to add a Parking and Curb Space Management Element entitled "Master Transportation Plan Parking and Curb Space Management Element," dated September 2009, to be included in the Amended MTP as defined in Attachment A to this Board Report, to be heard by the Planning Commission at its November 2, 2009 meeting, and by the County Board at its November 14, 2009 meeting.

ISSUES:

This request is to authorize advertisement of the proposed Parking and Curb Space Management Element of the Master Transportation Plan. The plan addresses such issues as: prioritization of the use of curb space; time and pricing strategies; adjustments to off-street parking requirements for new developments; unbundling parking from the cost of housing and office rents and discouraging parking subsidies; and reserved parking. Public comments received during the community review process have been incorporated into the proposed Element and/or addressed in the report.

SUMMARY: The current request is to authorize advertisement of the proposed MTP Parking and Curb Space Management Element. Parking and curb space management have not previously had elements in the Arlington Master Transportation Plan.

The Parking and Curb Space Management Element takes the 13 related policy statements that were adopted as part of the overall MTP Goals and Policies document and provides specific actions to implement each of those policies. Measures for tracking Arlington's performance in achieving its stated goals are also provided in the document.

BACKGROUND: In 1941, Arlington adopted its first long-range, County-wide transportation plan: Major Thoroughfares for Arlington, Virginia. Approximately 20 years later, a new

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thoroughfare plan was adopted, this time in concert with Arlington's General Land Use Plan (GLUP). Thereafter, in the mid-1970s, Arlington's long-range transportation plan became multimodal, with four elements adopted for bikeways, streets, transit and walkways. Ten years later, a new Countywide Plan, Master Transportation Plan – Part I was developed, bringing together the streets, bikeways and walkways into one document in 1986. Between 1986 and the current efforts to update the MTP and all elements thereof, a new element was adopted for paratransit, and the portions of the 1986 plan for bikeways (now, bicycle) and walkways (now, pedestrians) were updated in 2008.

In October 2004, the Arlington County Board tasked County staff to undertake a complete revision of the County's MTP. The public process was initiated with a community-transportation survey that generated responses from about 800 Arlington residents and a series of focus-group and public-forum sessions held in the fall of 2005. The information collected from the community was presented to the 24-member MTP Plenary Group which was comprised of representatives from several County advisory commissions, local partnerships, the Arlington Civic Federation and other community organizations. Over the course of a year-and-a-half of regular meetings, the MTP Plenary Group assisted the County staff and a consultant team with the development of the first draft of a new MTP. Three drafts of the proposed MTP revisions were presented for public review between June 2006 and March 2007 at public forums, on the County's website and through more than 50 presentations made to advisory committees and civic groups. In late 2007, the County Board decided to split adoption of the revised MTP into two general phases with the adoption of the overall goals, policies and map portions to occur first, and adoption of the six modal element documents to occur during 2008 and 2009.

In November and December of 2007, the County Board amended the MTP to adopt a Goals and Policies document and a MTP Map (known collectively as the "MTP Additions"). The new documents provided updated vision, objectives, goals and policies for the future of the Arlington transportation system, as well as identified key planned transportation facility and service additions including new streets, transit lines, intersection and roadway improvements, and bicycle/pedestrian trails. In July 2008, as part of the "MTP Additions" the County Board adopted the Bicycle and Pedestrian elements to the Amended MTP, in December 2008 the MTP Demand and System Management Element was adopted and in June 2009 the Transit Element was adopted. The four new elements plus the MTP Goals and Policies document and MTP Map were added to the Master Transportation Plan – Part I adopted in 1986 with subsequent supplements and amendments.

The MTP Additions, Bicycle Element, Pedestrian Element, Demand and System Management Element, Transit Element and the previously-adopted MTP documents (known as the Existing MTP) now comprise the Amended MTP. (See Attachment A to this report for definitions of other terms used herein.)

DISCUSSION: As part of the Comprehensive Plan, the MTP is Arlington's principal means of establishing planning policy for transportation matters. The MTP Additions were developed to incorporate the transportation-policy directives established by the County Board in recent years. Moreover, the MTP Additions guide the implementation of a multimodal transportation system that will serve the future Arlington as envisioned by the County's GLUP. By the year 2030

Arlington's residential and employment populations are forecasted to grow about 30%. Arlington will experience increased travel demands not only from its own growth, but also from greater amounts of pass-through travel. The forecasted increased travel demands will challenge Arlington's transportation system unless measures are imposed to manage travel times, shift more travel away from single-occupant driving and achieve greater efficiency in traffic accommodation. The proposed Parking and Curb Space Management Element is intended to guide County policy for the next 20 years, it is not intended that all of the proposed implementation actions will be put into effect immediately following its adoption, rather measures will be implemented over time based upon resource availability and community needs.

The provision of parking is determined by the use and intensity of land development and the availability of travel options. It is important to provide the right amount of parking – too much parking wastes resources that could otherwise be better utilized and can increase congestion of the road network, but too little parking can diminish access to the area and reduce marketability of an area to tenants, business and patrons. Both are hazardous to the vitality and economic health of the area. Management practices need to be cognizant of the diversity of built environments in Arlington and should be tailored to be compatible to those areas in which they are applied. The appropriate amount of parking for an area depends on various factors such as the planned capacity of surrounding streets, other transportation options, existing and proposed land uses, and environmentally advantageous goals set by Arlington.

In addition to supporting two MTP general policies of integrating transportation and land use, and managing travel demand and system management, the on- and off-street parking policies outlined in this element support the general policy for complete streets. On-street parking is often an important component of a complete street. Having the appropriate amount of well-managed parking contributes to a better balance between the various users of the rights-of-way. Further, keeping traffic volumes to a manageable level enhances the environment of the street for all users.

The strategy for managing parking and curb space is not intended to be uniform throughout Arlington. Most of Arlington's land area is devoted to low-density residences and the commercial uses that serve them. In those areas, there is almost always readily available surface parking (on-street or parking lots) free of charge. Where there is parking spillover from high-density and commercial areas into low-density residential areas, the Residential Permit Parking Program prioritizes parking for residents. The most acute parking and curb space concerns are typically found in the higher-density, mixed-use districts of Arlington. The Parking and Curb Space Management Element seeks to address those concerns through the established MTP policies and proposed implementation actions.

Major elements of the MTP Parking and Curb Space Management Element include:

- The 13 adopted parking and curb space-related policies for Arlington. Those policies provide guidance for how the County's Parking and Transportation Operations programs should operate over the next 20-some years. The Parking and Curb Space Management Element specifies more than 60 actions to be undertaken to implement the County's parking policies.

- The first inclusion in an Arlington MTP of management of curb space for parking, loading and other uses. The proposed element prescribes a prioritization amongst potential users of the curb space along Arlington’s streets. In addition to overarching principles on how curb space should be allotted, the proposed element includes tables that specify priorities for districts based upon their predominant densities and land uses.
- More-efficient utilization of curb space through active management measures including time-of-day restriction, new parking technologies, better use of remnant space and practical streetscape design.
- Revisions to the residential permit parking zones to reduce cross-zone commuting and allowance of some two-hour parking in zones not regularly used for commercial purposes.
- The establishment of variable-pricing policy that would set parking meter prices by district with the intent of achieving an “optimum” occupancy rate of 85% of capacity in each district. The hours of operation for parking meters would be extended when warranted according to developed criteria and in consultation with businesses and residents.
- Recognition that in a multi-modal environment, developers and the County government share in the responsibility for providing the transportation infrastructure and services to accommodate community needs.
- The assurance that if parking is built in excess of minimum site needs that the parking is shared with others outside the building, and that if parking is built below the amounts set forth in the zoning ordinance, then there will be an increase in TDM contributions to accommodate the increased need for commute alternatives.
- Promotion of sharing garages with complementary users and allowances for in-lieu fees and off-site parking provisions to achieve certain community goals such as minimizing overall parking construction and preservation of historical properties.
- The encouragement of measures such as “unbundling” and parking “cash out” that identify the actual cost of a parking space and enable an individual to choose between paying for a parking space and using transportation alternatives.
- Reductions in parking standards for new developments near transit nodes and for those projects that help advance County goals for affordable housing while addressing project impacts with adequate mitigation measures.
- Enhancement of travel options for persons with disabilities through provision of convenient access to curb space, reserved on-street spaces and dedicated off-street parking.
- Development of design guidelines for parking garages to improve user safety, comfort and convenience as well as establishment of a wayfinding system to assist motorists in finding available garage spaces.

Issues:

Prioritization of Curb Space: The curb space that lines Arlington’s streets is valued by many different users from cars, buses, shoppers, taxicabs and delivery vehicles, to pedestrian crossings and fire access. As the curb space is of limited supply, an active management program is needed to ensure that the limited space is put to the highest use and that at least some space is available at times for all the users, including the public at large. Appendix A of the draft Parking and Curb

Space Management Element includes three tables that establish general priorities between users for different areas of Arlington. Although curb space is typically used for vehicle operation and storage, the proposed Element also sets forth Arlington's policies for non-vehicular use of curb space (for example, crosswalks, vending and temporary storage). Depending on the area, the County proposes to prioritize the curb space differently, but will maintain two general guiding principles throughout: 1) public safety is the highest-priority, and 2) those uses that will serve the most users over the course of the 24-hour day will be given priority. This prioritization scheme could result in eventual changes to current conditions on some streets.

Time and Pricing Strategies: Parking meter hours and rates have traditionally been set on a uniformly County-wide. Although the price may be uniform and simple to understand, the demand for parking across the County varies. Where parking demand is high and prices are low, demand is likely to greatly exceed supply, resulting in full parking spaces and substantial traffic generated by vehicles cruising to find an open space. Likewise, when the price exceeds the demand, spaces are likely to go unused and valuable public resources may be underutilized. The proposed plan sets forth a variable-pricing policy whereby the prices of meters can vary by district or time of day to better match demand with supply. Variable pricing may be an effective tool in ensuring that parking spaces are used more efficiently providing a sufficient number of open spaces to minimize cruising and maximizing the utilization of a County resource. The proposed implementation strategy seeks to achieve an optimum utilization rate wherein parking spaces within a given district are occupied about 85% of the time. The 15% vacancy would enable motorists to find at least one open space reasonably close to their destination. However, a variable pricing policy could create significant confusion for the users if it is not implemented along with an effective information program.

Related to the variable pricing strategy is the document's implementation action to consider extending parking meter hours to include evenings and weekends to better support the retail community. The extended hours would be established according to developed criteria including demonstrated demand, the nature of the nearby land uses and alternative parking options. Extended hours would be tailored to address problems of on-street parking demand exceeding supply during certain times in specific locations, and ensure that valuable public on-street spaces are being used by, for example, retail patrons and the public at large rather than retail employees. Some restaurant and retail owners have expressed objections to any increase in parking prices as well as concerns that movement away from uniform meter prices and hours will cause user confusion resulting in reduced patronage. The Parking and Curb Space Management Element recommends implementing a pilot project in one commercial center to test the effectiveness of a variable pricing policy.

Adjustments to Off-Street Parking Requirements: The parking requirements in Arlington's Zoning Ordinance are based on the premise that there should be minimal impacts from new buildings on the surrounding parking supply. The County currently uses a standard of minimum amounts of parking for by-right buildings for different zoning districts. Providing less parking than those amounts is not allowed in the districts. However, the special exception process permits substantially more flexibility in parking requirements in order to meet certain County policies, so long as measures are taken to minimize the effects of the development's transportation demand on nearby properties and the public.

Developers continue to request permission to provide more or less parking than what the County's Zoning Ordinance sets forth as a standard minimum for the zoning category. When a project enters the site plan process, the minimum parking requirement is a starting point for determining the appropriate amount of parking for the project based upon the project characteristics and County objectives. Through the special exception process, developments may be approved by the County Board with less parking than is specified by the Zoning Ordinance in order to achieve other community goals. The draft Parking and Curb Space Management Element proposes that when a development provides less than the zoning ordinance-specified amount of parking, the reduction is balanced by enhanced Transportation Demand Management (TDM) or transit measures or contributions to ensure that the parking demand is reduced to meet the available supply and that the tenants use an alternative mode of transportation.

When developers propose to build more than the parking requirements in the ordinance, different policy issues are presented. Experience in Arlington and other communities has shown that providing excessive parking at low prices can have the effect of inducing more traffic to the development than a project with a lower parking ratio and higher prices. It has also been documented that excess parking currently exists in many garages in the urban parts of the County, so that there is sufficient parking to be shared with underparked facilities. Building more parking than is needed undermines the County's goal of reducing the carbon footprint. The proposed implementation action does not prevent a developer from building more parking than is required in the zoning ordinance. It simply states that, where the parking proposed is more than the zoning minimum, then the parking must be managed to ensure that it is shared with adjacent properties or users. One way of sharing this parking would be to enter into an off-site agreement with a nearby proposed building, which would enable a reduction in its on-site parking provision. Another way of sharing would be to open up the garage to other users for public parking during the day or evening.

The process whereby developers contribute towards infrastructure improvements and TDM measures when they build less parking can provide financial resources for the upgrade and operation of Arlington's transportation system. However, many developers feel that it is more appropriate to let the market rather than zoning requirements dictate the amount of parking that should be provided (whether that be more or less than the County's written targets). They have also expressed that they already contribute through property taxes and through voluntary TDM community benefits approved in the site plan process.

Unbundling Parking from the Cost of Housing and Office Rents and Discouraging Subsidies: In most residential and many commercial buildings, the price of the parking is incorporated (bundled) in the rent, lease or purchase price of the housing or office unit. This practice makes it difficult for a resident or office tenant to make a conscious choice of whether or not to purchase on-site parking with their residential unit or office space; and it provides a financial disincentive to reduce or eliminate driving and parking. "Unbundling" is the practice of separating the price of a parking space from the price of renting or owning a housing or office unit. Unbundling has been proven in various parts of the Country to lower the parking demand by over 10%, enabling the building of smaller garages.

In the office situation, employers have often provided for their employees parking subsidies for those that drive to work. This practice has been encouraged by federal tax laws which allow up to \$230 per month tax-free employee parking subsidy. Recently, the federal government has changed the tax laws to allow employers to provide the same amount of tax-free subsidy to their employees that commute via transit. Many communities also encourage employers to offer parking “cash out” to allow employees to take their parking subsidy as a cash allowance and use it for any other mode of transportation. Arlington County has taken advantage of this benefit and provides a tax-free transit benefit for its employees as well as a “cash-out” provision for those that work in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor. These fair practices should be encouraged in Arlington. Unbundling will facilitate rather than discourage these practices.

Some have advocated for the creation of site plan conditions requiring developers and property owners through their tenant leases to forbid their tenants from subsidizing their employee or tenant parking. The development community strongly objects to this involvement in how they operate their business.

Reserved Garage Parking Spaces:

The Master Transportation Plan includes a policy of maximizing the sharing of parking spaces in garages by various users throughout the day or night. Shared parking enables more efficient use of the parking spaces located in a garage and can reduce the overall amount of parking that is needed to serve parking demands within a district. A reduction in garage parking construction can reduce development costs and provide for more significant contributions towards other transportation improvements as well as produce more-environmentally sustainable development.

A key aspect of achieving effective parking sharing is to have spaces that are accessible and available for use by multiple parkers throughout the day and week. Spaces that are reserved for particular individual users are typically unavailable for use by any other parker and therefore unavailable for sharing. County staff would like to limit the percentage of spaces that can be individually reserved to no more than 20% of the total spaces within an office building’s garage. Building developers and managers have expressed concern that such a restriction limits their ability to lease their office spaces. The Arlington development industry feels that certain industries, such as law firms and multi-national corporations, will balk at signing leases that do not permit individually-reserved parking spaces for a high percentage of their employees. The representatives of NAIOP have requested that the maximum percentage of individually-reserved spaces in an office garage be set at no lower than 30%.

Community Process:

Arlington County staff has worked closely with the Arlington Transportation Commission and Economic Development Commission to draft and update the proposed element. This has included multiple public work sessions that have drawn input from representatives of the retail and building development and management industries. Staff has also reviewed the draft with the Planning and Disabilities Advisory commissions. In addition to the work sessions hosted by the Transportation Commission, members of the public were invited to participate at two review sessions held at community facilities this past April. Throughout the process, drafts of the element have also been posted on Arlington County’s website along with other elements of the

Master Transportation Plan (MTP), and public input has been invited. The current draft incorporates public comments that were submitted during a review period between July 1 and September 15. Attached is a summary of comments received from NAIOP on September 1st with the County staff response.

The proposed Parking and Curb Space Management Element is scheduled to be reviewed by the Transportation Commission and the Planning Commission at their meetings on October 29, and November 2, 2009, respectively, prior to the County Board hearing on November 14, 2009.

FISCAL IMPACT: Adopting the amendments to the Existing Plan to include a Parking and Curb Space Management Element, will impose no immediate financial commitments on the County. However, many of the proposed implementation actions in the document call for the establishment, operation and maintenance of higher levels of public facilities and services. The implementation actions proposed in the element can also affect the revenues that the County collects through parking meters and garages. Implementation of the MTP will require the County to determine to what extent, to which purposes, and on what schedule, it will commit its own revenues as well as those non-local funds that it may control. Such decisions will be made by the Arlington County Board as part of future operating- and capital-budget deliberations.

Attachment A: Master Transportation Plan (MTP) Terminology to Board Report for September 26, 2009 County Board Meeting.

Name:

Consists of:

Existing MTP

- Master Transportation Plan – Part I (1986), and
- All supplements and amendments since they were adopted by the County Board as reflected in the five-year updates, or otherwise.

MTP Additions

- MTP Goals and Policies Summary, adopted November 2007
- MTP Map, adopted December 2007
- Bicycle Element, adopted July 2008
- Pedestrian Element, adopted July 2008
- Demand and System Management Element, adopted December 2008
- Transit Element, adopted June 2009

Amended MTP

- *Existing MTP* and the *MTP Additions*

The *MTP Additions* will have precedence in instances of conflicts or inconsistencies with the *Existing MTP*.

Future MTP

- *MTP Additions* and the proposed future plan elements:
 - Parking and Curb Space Management Element
 - Streets Element