



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

County Board Agenda Item Meeting of June 17, 2008

DATE: June 11, 2008

SUBJECT: Request to Advertise Amendments to the County Comprehensive Plan to Adopt a Pedestrian Element, dated May 2008 to the Amended Master Transportation Plan (MTP), and to Repeal the 1997 Pedestrian Transportation Plan.

C. M. RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the advertisement of Amendments to the County Comprehensive Plan by a) adopting a document entitled "Master Transportation Plan Pedestrian Element," dated May 2008 to the Amended MTP, as defined in Attachment A to this Board report; and b) repealing the 1997 Pedestrian Transportation Plan, to be heard by the Planning Commission at its July 7, 2008 meeting, and by the County Board at its July 19, 2008 meeting.

ISSUES: The current request is to authorize advertisement of the proposed MTP Pedestrian Element. Among many recommendations the Pedestrian Element includes the following actions: the creation of new pedestrian connections between streets within residential neighborhoods and commercial districts; the establishment of an exemption process to permit street improvements to be implemented without constructing new sidewalks; the enactment of new regulations on newspaper-vending boxes, sidewalk cafes and other private intrusions into public sidewalk area; consideration of a snow-removal ordinance that requires property owners to keep adjacent public sidewalks clear of snow and ice; and, the use of innovative pedestrian-priority traffic signals on multi-lane arterial streets. These recommendations will be further discussed during the public hearings leading to adoption of the Pedestrian Element.

SUMMARY: The proposed Pedestrian Element establishes a plan for enhancing the walking environment in Arlington County by implementing the primary goals and pedestrian policies of the Master Transportation Plan. Key aspects of the Pedestrian Element are the actions to be undertaken to implement the primary pedestrian policies, as well as the pedestrian accommodation and design principles that will shape the walkway system. While the Pedestrian Element's central focus is enhancement of the physical walking environment, it also recognizes that education, encouragement and enforcement actions are necessary to improve pedestrian safety and achieve greater levels of pedestrian activity.

County Manager: _____

County Attorney: _____

Staff: Ritch Viola, DES, Transportation Planning

BACKGROUND: In 1941, Arlington adopted its first long-range, countywide transportation plan: Major Thoroughfares for Arlington, Virginia. Approximately 20 years later, a new thoroughfare plan was adopted, this time in concert with Arlington's General Land Use Plan. 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 was developed, bringing together the streets, bikeways and walkways into one document. That was approximately 22 years ago, and since then a new element was adopted for paratransit, and the portions of the 1986 plan for hiking, biking and jogging trails (now, bicycling) and walkways (now, pedestrians) have been updated.

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. The drafts also received extensive input and review by the County's Pedestrian Advisory Committee. 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 document to occur later.

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. The MTP Additions plus the previously adopted MTP documents (known as the Existing MTP) now comprise the Amended MTP. The Pedestrian Element is one of six supplemental modal element documents (Transit, Streets, Pedestrian, Bicycle, Transportation Demand and Systems Management, and Parking and Curbspace Management) that are intended to be adopted by the County Board, replacing the previously adopted corresponding MTP documents.

The two new documents were added to the five previously adopted MTP documents, including all subsequent supplements and amendments thereto:

- Master Transit plan (adopted in 1976)
- Master Transportation Plan – Part I (1986)
- Paratransit Element (1989)

- Bicycle Transportation Plan (1994)
- Pedestrian Transportation Plan (1997)

In 2008, the proposed Pedestrian Element and five other modal documents are to be adopted and to replace the five previously-adopted MTP documents. The proposed Pedestrian Element would directly replace the Pedestrian Transportation Plan as adopted in 1994 and subsequently amended on several occasions.

In addition to the scheduled July 19, 2008 County Board hearing, the draft Pedestrian Element has been reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Transportation Commission and the Planning Commission at their meetings of May 20, July 2 and July 7, 2008 respectively.

DISCUSSION: As part of the Comprehensive Plan, the MTP is Arlington’s principal means of establishing planning policy for transportation matters. The MTP Additions was 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 General Land Use Plan (GLUP). By the year 2030 Arlington’s residential and employment populations are forecasted to grow by about 30%. Arlington will experience increased travel demands not only from its growth, but also from greater amounts of pass-through travel.

The adopted MTP Goals and Policies Summary established 12 primary pedestrian-related policies for Arlington. Likewise, the adopted MTP Map identified 13 key bicycle and pedestrian facilities to be added to the County system. The proposed Pedestrian Element identifies how best to realize the County’s walking-related goals and to implement the pedestrian-related policies and needed walkway facilities. The proposed Pedestrian Element groups the policy statements into five categorical areas:

- completion of the Walkway Network,
- achieving a fully-accessible walkway network,
- increasing walking activity,
- improving pedestrian safety, and
- managing the walkway system to a high-quality standard.

Overall the Pedestrian Element identifies a total of 53 actions to be undertaken to implement the County’s pedestrian policies. The draft Pedestrian Element also includes a section of pedestrian-accommodation and design principles that are intended to reinforce the established policies and proposed implementation actions.

A primary objective of the Pedestrian Element is to complete the Walkway Network. The plan calls for the provision of at least one fully-accessible sidewalk along all Arlington streets. As funding is made available, the nearly 50 miles of local streets that currently lack sidewalks are to be reconstructed to incorporate a sidewalk. In addition to building new sidewalk, the County will also work with property developers to include new streets and sidewalks, or walking trails that increase the connectivity of the overall system and allow for more direct, safe walking trips.

A related primary objective of the Pedestrian Element is to achieve universal access for all pedestrians. Universal access requires both the construction of new, properly- designed facilities to complete the overall system and also the retrofit of much of the existing walkway network to satisfy Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) design requirements. Achieving full accessibility may require the acquisition of some additional public right-of-way to enable sidewalk widening, obstruction relocation and installation of the current standard for curb ramps.

Additional accessible walkways will also help Arlington achieve another of the primary objectives – a safer walking environment. Concern about personal safety is one of the most common reasons many persons choose other travel modes rather than walking. The Pedestrian Element calls for enhancement of the physical environment through sidewalk construction, street redesign and implementation of traffic-calming measures. However, it also emphasizes non-physical measures such as pedestrian-safety education and traffic-law enforcement as vital measures to bring about changes in motorist and pedestrian behavior so as to achieve the desired safety improvement.

Another objective of the Pedestrian Element is to encourage increased walking in Arlington. While the Pedestrian Element seeks to increase walking primarily as a transportation function, it also recognizes that increased walking provides fitness and recreation benefits as well. The document proposes actions aimed at improving Arlington’s physical environment, to make walking safer, and more convenient and enjoyable. In addition to physically rebuilding Arlington, more walking is to be encouraged through organized walking tours, dissemination of walking information, and heightened awareness of the many benefits of walking.

The remaining primary objective of the draft Pedestrian Element is to operate and maintain the walkway network so as to ensure safety and accessibility at all times. The Pedestrian Element places responsibility for maintaining good walkability with the County and the owners, tenants and operators of private properties adjacent to public walkways. Implementation actions in the document are focused on regular inspections as well as enforcement of local codes.

Issues:

Construction of Pedestrian Connections: The MTP seeks to enhance the ability of persons to walk within Arlington in part by calling for a more complete network of safe walkways. The walkway system is to include not only a sidewalk on at least one side of all streets but also new pedestrian trails that provide sidewalk linkages in areas where streets are built relatively far apart. The development of a more complete walkway network enhances walking by reducing the distances pedestrians must walk to reach their destinations. The draft plan calls for the development of multi-use trails or paved walkways, to short cut travel distances, in areas where pedestrians are inclined to travel and the establishment of new connecting streets is infeasible. The new trails or walkways would be built within public right-of-way acquired through the site-plan, subdivision, or Unified Residential Development processes.

In the past, residents adjacent to and the owners of development projects have sometimes objected to proposals that would construct new public walkways through their neighborhoods or their property. Their concerns have been about the potential loss of privacy or security due to having people walk by or across their properties. The draft plan identifies the need to improve

the connectivity of the walkway network and advocates for the public acquisition of easements and paved walkways that can provide significant improvements in the connectivity of the walkway system. Staff believes that such walkways can be designed to be harmonious with adjacent private properties.

Establishment of a Sidewalk-Exemption Process: Since the adoption of the 1997 Pedestrian Transportation Plan, Arlington's policy has been that all streets should have a continuous sidewalk along at least one side of the street. To implement that policy, County policies have required that all street-improvement projects include the construction of a sidewalk if a continuous sidewalk does not exist within the project area. On occasion, problems have arisen where the construction of a planned sidewalk would result in the loss of significant mature trees or have adverse impact upon registered-historical properties. In those instances the community has had to choose to either accept the loss of trees or cancel the street-improvement project.

The proposed Pedestrian Element continues the County policy of requiring that all street-improvement projects (not including paving) include construction of a continuous ADA-compliant sidewalk along at least one side of the project street when such a sidewalk currently does not exist. However, it does allow the County staff to grant an exemption under certain circumstances including the loss of significant mature trees, adverse impact upon historical properties, significant topographic challenges, or restricted street setbacks for significant numbers of houses. Exemption requests must be approved by vote of the local civic association and would not be granted where the project area has street conditions that make it unsafe for walking in the street or where there is significant generation of vehicle and pedestrian traffic each as determined by the County Transportation Division staff. As such, the proposed sidewalk-exemption policy would allow communities to pursue street improvements without sidewalks when pedestrian safety and accessibility would not be adversely affected and when the construction of a sidewalk would create significant adverse impacts upon the character of the neighborhood.

Sidewalk Intrusion Regulations: The proposed Pedestrian Element recognizes that sidewalk cafes, vendor carts and other streetside commerce can benefit pedestrians by creating more interesting and vital places to walk. On the other hand, there is the need to keep adequate sidewalk area clear of obstructions to permit comfortable walking and transit boardings/alightings and to maintain accessibility for all pedestrians. In certain locations within Arlington, sidewalk cafes and congregations of newspaper-vending machines have created obstructions that prevent comfortable and accessible use of sidewalk areas.

Arlington has utilized both the Zoning Ordinance and site-plan conditions to achieve improved compliance by sidewalk-café owners, and should examine enforcement measures for the owners of newspaper-vending-machines. On occasion, Arlington has been able to contact the owners of individual machines to request their relocation out of critical walking areas. However, as there are currently no requirements that newspaper vending machine owners contact the County to request approval or review of machine placements, staff has no mechanism to prevent new problem installations or to force relocations when a problem is discovered. The proposed Pedestrian Element advocates the adoption of local regulations, as well as any required State

enabling legislation, that would control the location of newspaper-vending-machines and permit the relocation of such machines if they are improperly placed upon the public sidewalk.

Snow Removal Ordinance: Arlington does not have an ordinance that requires property owners to clear snow and ice off the public sidewalks adjacent to their property. Instead, the County has undertaken an approach of negotiating sidewalk-clearance conditions for site-plan projects and asking other property owners to voluntarily clear sidewalks adjacent to their properties. In recent years, particularly during snowy winters, many Arlingtonians have expressed their interest in having the County enact a sidewalk-clearance ordinance. Many other Arlingtonians have voiced concerns against a sidewalk ordinance particularly as to how it might affect senior citizens and others who would be physically unable to shovel snow.

The proposed Pedestrian Element recognizes that snow-and ice-covered sidewalks pose significant obstructions and safety hazards for walkers. The plan also recognizes that no consensus exists on whether a snow-removal ordinance should be enacted. Therefore the plan calls for the consideration of enactment of a snow-removal ordinance and enforcement mechanism. The plan also states that with or without a snow-removal ordinance, a program should be undertaken to alert property owners and occupants to clear snow from the sidewalks adjacent to their properties.

Pedestrian Signal Warrants: Of all the dangerous situations pedestrians face, the riskiest locations are at uncontrolled (those that do not require traffic to stop) crosswalks on high-volume, multi-lane roadways. Multi-lane uncontrolled crossings, such as can be found on most of Arlington's arterial streets, pose a "multiple threat" danger (when one vehicle stops for a pedestrian, while a vehicle in the adjacent lane does not stop – often because their visibility is blocked by the first vehicle) to pedestrians. In these instances, the installation of a traffic signal would substantially enhance pedestrian safety.

All proposed traffic signal installations are analyzed by County staff using the standard warrants included in the MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Signal Control Devices) published by the Federal Highway Administration. There are two MUTCD signal warrants that consider pedestrian crossing volumes in determining when a traffic signal is justified. One is based upon school-related crossings and the other is for all pedestrians; both consider the volume of pedestrian crossings and the frequency of gaps in the traffic stream. Although Arlington has many pedestrians, there are few locations in Arlington that have large-enough pedestrian crossing volumes to meet the MUTCD warrants. While use of the MUTCD warrants does not supersede a traffic engineer's professional judgment, use of standard traffic signals to protect pedestrians is currently limited by the functional constraints they put on efficient management of the roadway network.

Arlington needs to find measures that can better protect the safety of pedestrians crossing multi-lane streets that do not meet the established signal warrants. One approach would be the use of the innovative HAWK (high-intensity activated crosswalk) signal and its variants. These signals are not necessarily intended to improve vehicular access from side streets, as many standard

signals do. They are specifically designed to enhance driver awareness of a pedestrian's intention to cross a street. To date, Arlington has not utilized the HAWK signal as unlike conventional traffic signals, it is still currently does not have established warrants for installation. As the proposed Pedestrian Element seeks to improve pedestrian safety in part through enhancements in street design and other physical improvements, advancements in pedestrian-oriented traffic signal technology and/or signal warrant revisions would be helpful.

FISCAL IMPACT: Adopting the amendments to the Existing Plan by adding thereto the proposed Pedestrian Element will impose no immediate financial commitments from the County. However, many of the proposed implementation actions in the Pedestrian Element call for significant financial investments for the construction, operation and maintenance of walkways and trails. 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 June 17, 2008 County Board Meeting.

Name:

Consists of:

Existing MTP

- Master Transit Plan (adopted in 1976),
- Master Transportation Plan – Part I (1986),
- Paratransit Element (1989),
- Bicycle Transportation Plan (1994),
- Pedestrian Transportation Plan (1997), 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

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:
 - Bicycle Element
 - Pedestrian Element
 - Transportation Demand and Systems Management Element
 - Transit Element
 - Parking and Curbspace Management Element
 - Streets Element