



Arlington Chamber of Commerce
Opportunity. Leadership. Results.

**Arlington Chamber of Commerce
2016 Arlington Local
Policy Positions**

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Arlington County has garnered recognition locally and on an international scale as a world-class community and a premiere location for commercial enterprise. The Arlington Chamber of Commerce is proud of its members for their role in making these accolades possible. Arlington businesses are a crucial component of providing the live, work, play balance Arlington strives to create. The contributions of a strong and vibrant business community provide the resources necessary to sustain high levels of service and public infrastructure.

However, the local economy is currently facing challenges with elevated commercial vacancy rates, federal government contractions and increasing competition within the region for business attraction and retention. It is imperative for the continued success of the local economy as well as the fiscal health and sustainability of the community that all efforts be made to ensure a positive and welcoming business climate. Arlington's policy environment should foster, rather than stifle or discourage private sector investment and growth. To this end, the Arlington Chamber calls on the Arlington County Board to embrace the policy priorities below.

Organizational Reform

The County has made tremendous strides over the past two years in establishing a more open and receptive dialogue with the business community. Notably, the appointment of a Business Ombudsman to examine and reform County processes where the local government intersects with businesses and to serve as a problem-solver and point of contact for businesses working with the County has been particularly well received. As the County experiences turnover in leadership both at the staff and elected levels, the Chamber calls on the County to continue to work towards instilling this emphasis on business attraction and accommodation throughout the organizational culture.

Specifically, the Chamber supports the acceptance and implementation of the business relevant recommendations from both the recently convened Business Brain Trust and the Community Facilities Study Task Force. The Chamber further supports process revisions to incorporate economic impact analyses into staff reports to the County Board where appropriate and to seek the input of and engage affected business sectors at the outset of the policy development timeline.

Additionally, the Chamber urges regular reexamination of regulations, policies and processes affecting local businesses in order to identify and streamline procedural chokepoints and ease regulatory burdens that draw focus away from the unfettered exchange of commerce. The Chamber also supports the appointment of business community representatives to relevant Boards and Commissions to ensure that their composition mirrors that of the community and that the commercial perspective is proactively sought during policy formulation. The Chamber encourages the County to continue to further embrace public private partnerships, like the Business Improvement Districts and the innovative partnership with Forest City to redevelop Ballston Quarter.

Economic Development

Given the current challenges facing the local economy, and the fiscal strain that this places on the County's fiscal picture, the Chamber calls on the County Board to make economic development a chief policy priority. In order to achieve the County's economic development goals and objectives, the Chamber supports increased investment in the expansion of the commercial revenue base through the marketing and business attraction efforts of Arlington Economic Development. Specifically, the Chamber supports a focus on competitive incentives to both attract and retain businesses.

The Chamber further supports a predictable stream of revenue to support the promotion of tourism by Arlington Economic Development. The Chamber remains optimistic for a full resurrection of the surcharge on the transient occupancy tax, but if that is not possible we ask for this to be accomplished through the County government's regular budget process.

The Chamber is open to supporting regional approaches to economic development that would lessen competition between Virginia localities. We think that some collaboration is possible and could be beneficial to everyone involved.

Taxes and Fiscal Policy

The Chamber supports a rational balance of the tax burden among businesses, residents, and users of services. The Chamber strongly urges that additional savings and economies of scale be sought and adopted before the County government considers any increase in the real estate tax burden for Fiscal Year 2017, and urges the County Board and County Manager to make the difficult decisions necessary to avoid tax increases in the upcoming budget cycle.

In keeping with the emphasis on economic development and expansion, the Chamber encourages a local study of comparative tax rates between Arlington and surrounding jurisdictions to discover specific tax rates and impact fees that put the County at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining certain segments of the business community.

The Chamber conditionally supports the real estate tax surcharge on commercial real estate to support the development of transportation infrastructure as authorized by the Virginia General Assembly. The Chamber is pleased by Arlington's willingness to provide information on how funds raised through the surcharge have been spent to date. The Chamber continues to believe that revenues from the surcharge on commercial and industrial properties should be directed towards projects that directly affect those businesses subject to the tax.

The Chamber also supports the use of standard accepted appraisal practices in accordance with state law in the generation of real estate tax assessments. The Chamber favors the appointment of members of the Board of Equalization by the Circuit Court, as is the case with members of Boards of Zoning Appeals, rather than by elected officials. This would ensure that Boards of Equalization could maintain independence in their deliberations and decision-making. The Chamber further supports consideration of transferring the oversight of the Board of Equalization from the Assessor's office to the Office of the Commissioner of Revenue, to achieve further separation and independence between the Assessor and the Board.

Infrastructure

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce supports the implementation of the recommendations produced by the Community Facilities Study Task Force. Both a formal, integrated strategic needs assessment and a public facilities siting process should be a priority for the County in 2016. The Chamber encourages the County to recognize land swap deals as a community benefit of equal importance to other community benefits. While spending tax dollars wisely is always a priority, the Chamber would be remiss if we did not point out that infrastructure projects, including recreational ones, benefit businesses and workers in addition to County residents.

The Chamber encourages the addition of mass-transit systems (streetcars, bus-rapid transit or similar) in the Crystal City/Potomac Yard and Columbia Pike corridors, and, ultimately, into Shirlington. The Chamber is concerned by the fact that a new transit plan for Columbia Pike has still not yet been proposed. The slow revisions and consistent delay of a deliverable plan is unacceptable and the residents and business of Columbia Pike deserve better.

Housing Affordability and Workforce Housing

A sustainable community requires a range of housing options affordable to a broad spectrum of citizens. Moreover, the strength and viability of the local economy relies on the availability of a mix of housing options as it directly impacts workforce recruitment and retention. It also serves as a key factor in business location decisions, further underscoring the need to take measures to ensure that the County's economic development efforts and commercial revenue base are not negatively impacted.

The County Board's recent adoption of the Affordable Housing Master Plan and Implementation Framework set the County on a course to be on the leading edge of addressing this important issue. The Chamber agrees with the direction adopted as part of these two policy documents that the best, perhaps only, way to obtain substantial additional units that are affordable to a broad part of the community and to preserve existing housing stock in the local area is to provide developers and property owners with incentives – including but not limited to increased density and real estate tax credits or abatements – in return for the creation or preservation of housing units that are affordable across a broad portion of the local population.

The Chamber encourages County officials to consider a lower real estate tax rate and/or other tax incentives and solutions in cases where such a rate would help preserve affordable housing.

Land Use and Zoning

The Chamber supports the coordination of commercial and residential density in established transit corridors. The Chamber further holds that land use policy and regulations should be flexible in their application so as to attract the investment of commercial and residential developers in the County. Such policy should incorporate incentives and avoid any undue and unnecessary restrictions to foster the most hospitable environment possible.

A necessary component to the attraction of commercial investment to Arlington County is streamlining and maximizing the efficiency of planning and permitting processes. The Chamber supports the recently unveiled initiatives of the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development to accomplish this objective. These regulatory processes should be examined and redesigned to achieve their purpose while minimizing the regulatory and administrative burden placed upon businesses seeking to invest in the County. The Chamber encourages the Department of Environmental Services to make similar procedural and cultural shifts, as this department has a significant role in projects.

The Chamber supports a reasonable approach to the site-plan development process, allowing for flexibility for proposed projects which help the County to achieve strategic goals, including the enhancement of the commercial revenue base. Additionally, the Chamber strongly agrees with the Community Facilities Study Task Force that the role of the Business Improvement Districts should be enhanced, including expanding BIDs' authority and ability to be flexible in responding and anticipating changing market environments within their district overlays.

The Chamber supports local governments working with the building industry to develop and adopt reasonable conditions for a transportation-demand management plan and modern parking ratios, but we urge Arlington County not to overstep its legal and constitutional authority as it relates to the site-plan process.

The Chamber opposes any effort that would impede property owners from safely managing the parking on their property. In a community such as Arlington, where space is at a premium, responsible parking management is a vital component of private property rights.

Workforce & Education

The local economy is fueled by a highly skilled and educated workforce. The Chamber recognizes that a strong K-12 school system is a key component not only in providing that base of qualified employees, but also serves as a focal point for businesses looking at Arlington County as a potential site location.

The Chamber supports initiatives and programs to maintain the County's world-class school system through efforts to reduce class size and provide the necessary infrastructure to keep up with growing enrollment, and to align training and educational programs with projected workforce needs, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The Chamber further supports competitive compensation for educators at all levels of the public education spectrum, and supports continuing, collaborative initiatives to provide opportunities for dual-enrollment college credits for all Arlington students as a part of their high school program of studies.

The Chamber supports the continued presence of a Workforce Investment Board dedicated to Arlington and Alexandria, distinct from other regions of Northern Virginia.

General Policy

The Chamber of Commerce supports maintaining the integrity of the Dillon Rule. Specifically, the County government should not undertake to coerce businesses, of any size, to provide specific wage levels, benefits, or working conditions, outside of the framework of applicable federal and state law.

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce encourages the County to foster a collaborative dynamic between the public and private sectors, recognizing the importance of the business community in creating and maintaining Arlington as a world community with exceptional services and amenities. We encourage the County to view the Chamber and the Arlington business community as a true partner.

Chamber Contacts

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