

To: Arlington 2050 Project Team, CPHD Planning Division
CC: Rana Abu Ghazaleh, Arlington 2050 Project Manager
From: Sam Myers Jr., 28-Year Arlington Resident & Student Athlete Parent
Re: Written Comment – Spring 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update / Arlington 2050 Draft Guiding Principles
Date: June 12, 2026

Comment Submission Summary

Dear Arlington 2050 Project Team,

I am a 28-year Arlington resident and parent of student athletes. This comment is written through that lens and addresses a specific, documentable gap in the Arlington 2050 draft guiding principles: **the absence of any actionable commitment to sports and recreation infrastructure as a community health investment, workforce priority, or equity standard – across all seven guiding principles.**

Sports and recreation infrastructure serves Arlington's entire community – children developing resilience and social connection, families building neighborhood relationships on sidelines and in gyms, adults maintaining the civic connections that protect against isolation, and professional and recreational organizations that have never had a permanent home.

This comment addresses the access gap across all of those constituencies.

The Core Finding

Disregard of Evidence: Sports and recreation access for Arlington families, youth, and communities of all ages is absent or insufficiently addressed across all seven guiding principles. The document uses words like thriving, equitable, wellbeing, and accessible without ever naming sports and recreation infrastructure – one of the most documented community health, workforce development, and anti-displacement investments available.

Disregard of Virginia Code: Virginia Code Section 15.2-2223 explicitly contemplates that comprehensive plans will address sports playing fields and active recreation. The current draft does not honor what state law contemplates.

Disregard of Arlington's Own Community Voice: Arlington's own teenagers told the planning team this directly in the May 2025 focus group. It did not make it into the draft.

The Public Spaces Master Plan Refresh is running in parallel. What gets written into the guiding principles now will directly determine what the PSMP Refresh is required to address this fall. I am requesting at least three critical language additions to ensure the PSMP Refresh has a mandate to close the field shortage – not merely permission to consider it.

Three Critical Language Additions

The full written comment that follows identifies gaps across multiple sections of all seven guiding principles. These three are the most urgent — the places where the absence of specific, actionable language will most directly limit what the PSMP Refresh is required to address this fall.

Section 4.2 – Community Wellbeing (MOST URGENT):

Name accessible sports and recreation infrastructure as a documented behavioral health intervention – not a lifestyle amenity – and commit to shared-use public-private partnerships as the delivery mechanism. Given Arlington's acute mental health crisis, this is the most consequential gap in the document.

Section 5.5 – Workforce Opportunity and Economic Mobility:

Name organized sports and physical activity as a workforce development investment. The skills sports builds are precisely those least susceptible to AI automation. Only 23% of kids in poverty play sports vs. 44% from households earning over \$100K. The access gap is an economic opportunity gap.

Section 7.5 – Accountable Stewardship:

Name shared-use public-private partnerships as a preferred mechanism for expanding community sports and recreation infrastructure without full county capital investment. This is the fiscally responsible path and the county's own standards require it.

The Stakes

Arlington 2050 governs all twelve elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

Get the guiding principles right and the General Land Use Plan protects fields from development pressure, the Historic and Cultural Resources Plan protects living community sports traditions, and the PSMP Refresh has a mandate to close the field shortage.

Get the guiding principles wrong and the county encodes the same blind spot for another 25 years – the blind spot that produced gymnastics cuts, 44% fee increases, a field availability framework that responded to community pressure by restricting access rather than expanding it, and a tracking system so unreliable that staff acknowledged permit data 'isn't necessarily 100% accurate' after two years of trying. These are not hypothetical risks. They are the documented record of what happens when critical sports and recreation infrastructure has no policy foundation protecting it.

Because this is a 25-year policy document with a June 14 public comment deadline – the first update to Arlington's Comprehensive Plan since 1960 – the record deserves the full argument, not just this summary.

The supporting background that follows documents how that failure happened, why it matters, and exactly what language would fix it.

Sincerely,

Sam Myers Jr.

28-Year Arlington, VA Resident and Parent of Student Athletes

Former White House Liaison, U.S. Department of Education (Secretary Arne Duncan)

Former U.S. Department of Education Liaison to Michelle Obama's Let's Move! Initiative

Founder and CEO, Place Public Affairs – strategy and cultural advocacy

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Comment Submission Supporting Background

1. Why I Am Getting Involved

I am writing as a concerned parent first. My two sons are student athletes, and over the years, conversations on sidelines and in parking lots have made one thing clear: the access gap is real, and Arlington families feel it every day. Too far to drive. Program full. Waitlist. No field available. We have the resources to make it work. A lot of families don't.

And the gap doesn't stop at childhood. Parents lose the sideline community that connects them to neighbors. Adults lose the recreational leagues that anchor their wellbeing. The DC Divas – a three-time national champion professional women's football team – still can't find a permanent home field in this county. Older adults walking tracks report the same access barriers as youth leagues. Sports and recreation access is a community-wide infrastructure failure, not just a youth programming gap.

Our family has been part of Arlington Soccer for years. The parent emails about field shortages and capacity constraints are not recent. They are a running thread through every season, every year – because the supply of fields has never kept pace with the demand.

The Arlington Soccer Association – over 6,500 players, 55 years in this county – has been formally writing letters to the County Board about field infrastructure since at least 2017, on the public record at arlingtonsoccer.com. They are a named Project Play Champion through the Aspen Institute. This is not a new problem the county hasn't heard about. It's a chronic problem the county has heard about for nearly a decade with no policy framework to address it.

I also spend my professional life advocating for greater community access to culture. The argument I make for culture centered advocacy organizations and nonprofits and the argument I am making in this letter are the same. Culture develops human capacities no algorithm can replicate. And systematically treating culture as an optional amenity rather than essential civic infrastructure is a missed opportunity and a disservice to communities.

Beyond my professional life, I'm a musician who founded an Arlington based community organization that has helped raise \$60,000 for Arlington nonprofits, including JBLF, AFAC, and Bridges to Independence. The organization – the Westover Knights Band – has made supporting Arlington community organizations the core of why we perform. I am not writing this letter from the outside looking in. I have been showing up for this community – on stage, on sidelines, and now at a planning table.

So when Arlington County proposed eliminating its gymnastics programs in the FY2027 budget – a 47-year-old institution serving thousands of families – I was not just disappointed. I was alarmed. That decision came at precisely the moment when Arlington families need this infrastructure most. The 44 percent fee increase that followed is already pricing out the families who need access most. And that decision was part of a larger pattern of getting this wrong going back years. The difference now is that we have an opportunity to embrace system change to get it right – or continue failing Arlington families for at least another 25 years.

2. A Pattern That Cannot Continue

The gymnastics fight is not an isolated incident. It is the most recent expression of a pattern that reflects a county that has never written sports and recreation infrastructure into its foundational policy document – and has paid the price in repeated cuts, rising fees, and shrinking access.

A Documented Record, Not an Opinion

- **FY2027:** Proposed elimination of 47 years of youth gymnastics at Barcroft Community Center. Community organized 56 speakers across two County Board hearings and forced a partial reversal. Fees still increased 44 percent.
- **FY2025:** Sports league fees adjusted upward in the adopted budget – pricing out lower-income families from programs they were already in.
- **2021-2023:** The county's own field availability survey found residents consistently highlighting insufficient time and space for drop-in community use of athletic fields, and that only 36 of 96 fields have lights. The survey that produced these findings sampled 107 people to set access policy for a county of 240,000.
- **2023:** The county's own field management staff acknowledged that accurately tracking whether permitted leagues are actually using their reserved field time remains *"a work in progress"* after nearly two years of effort – and that permit information *"isn't necessarily 100% accurate."* Youth sports participation in Arlington has grown 60 percent over seven years. The county cannot close a gap it is not tracking. Arlington 2050 is the opportunity to require that it start.
- **2023:** The county's own Athletic Field Availability Framework proposed reclassifying the six remaining drop-in fields – the last 6 percent of Arlington's 96 fields available for casual community access – to permit-takes-priority status. The county's response to years of community pressure was not to expand supply. It was to formalize restrictions on the supply that existed.
- **2021:** The Aurora Highlands Civic Association wrote multiple letters to the County Board and circulated a petition for open access to nearby diamond athletic fields. A civic association – not a sports organization – was forced to formally petition the County Board for the right to use a field.
- **COVID:** The county closed recreational facilities and cancelled youth sports programs for two years. It never made a systematic effort to address the mental health damage done to the cohort of Arlington children who lost two years of organized sport during their most formative years. That debt has never been acknowledged.

These decisions were made in a policy environment that treated sports and recreation as optional. Arlington 2050 has the power to change that permanently. Or it can encode the same blind spot for another generation.

3. What Arlington Already Knows – And Has Not Yet Written Down

The case for sports and recreation infrastructure as essential civic investment is no longer advocacy. It is documented evidence – and it converges from multiple directions.

And the research on sports as a civic practice that connects communities points to the same conclusion. Sports access develops human capacities that no algorithm can replicate, and are systematically undertreated as optional amenities rather than the essential civic infrastructure they are.

What follows is what Arlington already knows – and has not yet written down.

The Mental Health Case – Arlington's Most Urgent

- A peer-reviewed meta-analysis published in July 2025 – drawing on 46 longitudinal studies, up to 54 years of follow-up data, and up to 50,000 participants – found that youth sport participation produces statistically significant reductions in mental ill-being over time. This is not one study. It is the gold standard of evidence.
- A 2024 Ohio State and Baylor University study found that those who dropped out of sports had worse mental health outcomes than those who never played at all. Every barrier to participation Arlington creates or fails to remove is producing measurable psychological harm.
- Active youth are three times less likely to feel depressed than sedentary youth.
- Achieving the federal Healthy People 2030 youth sports participation goal would save \$3.61 billion in direct medical costs and \$28.38 billion in productivity losses – with a significant portion tied specifically to reduced depression and anxiety.
- Around 25,000 federal workers work in Arlington. Federal employment accounts for roughly 40 percent of the county's economy. Dr. Amy Bowers, a licensed clinical psychologist based in Arlington who spoke on the record to local news about the federal workforce mental health crisis, has described the impact of federal workforce cuts as a lasting mental health crisis – trauma in the clinical sense. That trauma comes home to the children who play on Arlington's fields.

Workforce Development

- The capacities that organized team sports develop – adaptability, resilience, emotional intelligence, collaboration under pressure, the ability to fail and recover – are precisely the skills workforce researchers identify as least susceptible to AI automation and most valued by employers navigating technological disruption.
- Only 23 percent of kids in poverty play organized sports, compared to 44 percent from households earning over \$100,000. The cost of youth sports has increased 46 percent since 2019. This is not a recreational access gap. It is a systemic economic opportunity gap.

Community Cohesion, Families, and Anti-Displacement

- The U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness a public health epidemic. Sports leagues and recreation fields are among the last remaining spaces where people of different incomes, backgrounds, and zip codes show up in the same place, at the same time, for a shared purpose.
- Green Valley went from 60 percent Black in 2000 to under 20 percent Black today. Accessible, affordable, community-controlled sports facilities are anti-displacement infrastructure – one of the few remaining spaces where original and new community members share ground.
- This is not only a children's issue. Parents build community on the sideline. Families share intergenerational experience through sport. Adults in recreational leagues maintain the social connections that protect against isolation and foster wellness. When a program is cut or a field is unavailable, the entire family loses something.

Project Play and the National Policy Framework

The Aspen Institute's Project Play – the nation's foremost research and advocacy organization on youth sports access – documents in its State of Play 2025 report that costs of youth sports have risen 46 percent since 2019, with the regular play disparity between highest and lowest income families reaching 20.2 percentage points. Project Play's 63x30 initiative calls on communities to reach the federal public health goal of 63 percent youth sports participation by 2030.

In March 2025, Project Play released State of Play Washington D.C. – their 16th community report and a comprehensive analysis of youth sports access in our immediate neighbor. It surveyed nearly 600 children, mapped participation deserts across the city's eight wards, documented that transportation barriers affect 50 percent of low-income families compared to 9 percent of high-income families, and recommended the creation of a coordinated Athletic Council to build a coherent system for underserved youth.

DC, Arlington's immediate neighbor with shared demographic and economic ties, has a Project Play community report. DC also has a recommended Athletic Council. And yet Arlington has a Comprehensive Plan being updated right now that does not name sports access as a community health investment. Arlington 2050 makes no reference to the realworld data, framework, or documented access gaps it exists to close.

4. The Stakes: One Document, Twelve Elements, Twenty-Five Years

Arlington 2050 is not one plan among many. It is the introductory chapter – the values document – that governs all twelve elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Whatever goes into the guiding principles becomes the policy standard against which every subsequent decision must be consistent.

Some may argue that sports and recreation infrastructure belongs in the Public Spaces Master Plan Refresh – also currently underway – rather than the guiding principles. That argument has the logic backwards.

The PSMP Refresh must be consistent with the guiding principles. If those principles do not name sports and recreation access as a community health investment, shared-use partnerships as a preferred mechanism, and equitable access as a measurable standard, the PSMP Refresh has no policy mandate to prioritize any of those things. The guiding principles are the prerequisite. The PSMP Refresh is the implementation. You cannot get the implementation right if the prerequisite is silent.

Get it right, and the opportunity is transformational

The Public Spaces Master Plan – currently being refreshed with community engagement running through fall 2026 – must be consistent with the guiding principles. If those principles name sports and recreation infrastructure as a documented community health investment and commit to shared-use partnerships as a preferred expansion mechanism, the PSMP Refresh has a policy mandate to prioritize field access, close the Level of Service gap, and identify partnership sites accordingly. The field shortage becomes a problem the plan is required to solve.

The General Land Use Plan must honor the same principles. If the guiding principles name accessible community athletic and recreational facilities as essential infrastructure, the GLUP has a

policy foundation for protecting parcels from development pressure. Fields that might otherwise be lost to the next wave of development get protected before the pressure arrives, not after.

The Historic and Cultural Resources Plan must honor the same principles. If the guiding principles name living cultural practices – including organized sports and performing arts traditions – as resources worthy of protection, the county has a policy framework for treating a 47-year-old gymnastics program as a cultural institution rather than a budget line.

Get it wrong, and the cost compounds in the opposite direction

A guiding principles document written in the language of intention rather than commitment gives every downstream element permission to continue operating exactly as it has. The result is not stasis. It is compounding scarcity. As Arlington grows, development pressure increases, costs rise, and access narrows. A policy document that does not actively push toward abundance produces scarcity by default.

5. The Structural Problem No One Is Naming

Arlington's Comprehensive Plan has twelve elements. Eleven govern physical infrastructure – housing, transportation, energy, forestry, sewer, stormwater, water, land use, historic preservation, recycling, and Chesapeake Bay protection. The twelfth is the Public Spaces Master Plan, which governs parks, open space, and athletic fields.

A Plan Built for a County That No Longer Exists

The plan was built in 1960 for an Arlington where fields were abundant, costs were low, and communities organized informally. Those assumptions have not been true for decades. And yet for 65 years, no one updated it. Not one of the twelve elements treats sports and recreation access as a community health investment, a workforce development priority, or an equity infrastructure question.

Actions Do Not Match Language

The Arlington County Board's own adopted vision statement declares: *"Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important."*

"Each person is important" and *"a caring, learning, participating community"* are not words that describe a community where teenagers cannot find a drop-in basketball court within walking distance, where a 47-year-old gymnastics program gets eliminated in a budget cycle, and where the county's foundational policy document does not name sports and recreation access as a community health investment. Arlington 2050 is the instrument through which that vision either becomes operational policy or remains a sentence on a website.

The officials who will vote on this document have said what they believe – on the record, in their own campaigns and in office.

Board member JD Spain campaigned explicitly on expanding the county's park system recreational offerings, stating that *"Arlington's children need safe places to study, play, and cultivate their skills*

together.” He has spoken about youth engagement and mental health as interconnected priorities since 2019, saying directly: *“The idle mind is the devil’s workshop. And so we need to focus in on engaging our youth.”*

Board Chair Takis Karantonis named youth mental health as his top priority in his 2025 inaugural remarks, and in a March 2023 work session specifically pushed the Parks Department to expand teen programming in response to the mental health and substance abuse crisis affecting Arlington youth.

These are not abstract commitments. They are documented, on-record statements from the officials responsible for adopting this document. Arlington 2050 is the instrument through which those commitments either become durable policy or remain aspirational language with no enforcement mechanism. The document as drafted is closer to the latter.

Lots of Intent, Very Little Commitment

The result is a self-reinforcing policy loop. Each element operates in its own lane, with its own advisory commission, its own staff, its own priorities. No overarching framework says: sports and recreation access is not a department concern. It is a community value that every element of this plan must honor.

Arlington 2050 is supposed to be that framework. But a north star written in the language of intention rather than commitment is not a north star. It is a mirror.

Read through the draft and count the times the following words appear without a specific outcome attached, a measurement defined, or an accountability mechanism named:

- **Thriving** – the document’s most prominent broken promise. The first guiding principle is Livable and Thriving Arlington. The word appears without ever defining what infrastructure thriving requires or how the county will measure whether residents are actually thriving.
- **Equitable / Equity** – appears constantly but is never defined operationally. Equity without measurement is aspiration, not policy. A pool that exists but is too expensive and too far for a teenager without a car is not equitable access.
- **Wellbeing** – section 4.2 is named Community Wellbeing. The documented behavioral health interventions that actually produce wellbeing – organized sports, physical activity, community connection – are not named. Wellbeing without the infrastructure that produces it is a word, not a commitment.
- **Support** – the most dangerous word in the document. Support wellbeing. Support active lifestyles. Support diverse communities. Every commitment that uses support can be honored by doing almost nothing.
- **Ensure** – sounds strong but is a promise of a promise. Ensure Arlington supports a healthy lifestyle commits the county to making sure something is supported – without saying what it will do when it isn’t.

This is not accidental. It is how comprehensive plans are typically written – vague enough to survive political opposition, specific enough to feel meaningful, aspirational enough to generate consensus. The problem is that Arlington 2050 is the first update in 65 years and it is being written during the most consequential moment in this county’s recent history. Writing it in the language of intention rather than commitment is choosing comfort over consequence – and Arlington’s families deserve better.

6. The Community Voice That Was Heard and Disregarded

The evidence that this pattern has real costs is already in the county's own public record – and it came from the community's own teenagers.

The Teens and College Students focus group – conducted May 19, 2025, at Central Library, documented and published by county staff – produced exactly the kind of community voice this document needs to reflect. Arlington's own teenagers told the planning team, in their own words:

"There isn't too much to do for teens, they tend to get into worse things if there is nothing to do."

"More basketball courts; drop-in enforced to play."

"County pools are expensive and far. Uptown Hill and Long Branch are big rec facilities, but not practical day to day. Uptown Hill isn't walkable, only accessible by car. Access to gyms should be more accessible in price."

"Not too many parks and places to go outside. As teenagers, there aren't too many places to walk to. Parks should not be difficult to access – policies should enforce that, so it's normalized."

"Health and safety go beyond physical health. Mental health and actually feeling safe and welcomed is imperative... third places to socialize that DO NOT necessarily require money, especially for youth."

That community voice is in the public record. Documented by county staff. Published in the county's own engagement materials. It did not make it into the draft guiding principles in any specific or actionable form.

Arlington's own teenagers named the access gap. They named the cost barrier. They named the proximity problem. They explicitly connected physical spaces to mental health. The county recorded every word. And then produced a document that addresses none of it specifically.

That is the loop. Community says it. County records it. Plan ignores it. Decisions get made without a policy foundation to require anything different. And decades pass.

Arlington 2050 can break the loop – but only if it is written to do so. Not with more platitudes about thriving and wellbeing. With specific, measurable, actionable language that names sports and recreation infrastructure as a documented community health investment, a workforce development priority, and an equity infrastructure requirement. Language that the General Land Use Plan must honor. Language that the Historic and Cultural Resources Plan must honor. Language that the Public Spaces Master Plan must honor.

That is what systems change looks like in a Comprehensive Plan. Not a new element. Not a new commission. Not a new study. A clear, unambiguous statement in the foundational values document that sports and recreation access is essential civic infrastructure – and that every subsequent decision made under this plan must be consistent with that commitment.

7. A Note on Process – and What Was Missing From It

Virginia Code Section 15.2-2223, which governs the preparation of comprehensive plans throughout the Commonwealth, explicitly contemplates that such plans will address *"active and passive recreation"* and designate *"a system of community service facilities such as parks, sports playing fields, forests, schools, playgrounds"* and related infrastructure. Sports playing fields are named in the state statute. The current draft guiding principles do not name sports fields or recreation infrastructure with the specificity that Virginia's own planning law contemplates. I am asking that they do.

The Arlington 2050 process ran nine targeted community focus groups – representing Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, teen, low-income renter, disability, Asian American, LGBTQIA+, Middle Eastern, and business communities.

Not one focus group represented youth sports families, recreational users, physical activity advocates, or the organizations serving them.

The blind spot in the document reflects the blind spot in the process. And yet the community voice was already there. Arlington's own teenagers told the planning team directly. The Arlington Soccer Association has been writing formal letters to the County Board about field access since 2017. The Aurora Highlands Civic Association petitioned the County Board for the right to use a field in 2021. This voice exists. It has been expressed repeatedly through official channels. It has not been reflected in the document.

I respectfully request that the written comments submitted through this channel – particularly those addressing sections 4.2, 5.5, 7.5, 1.4, 2.4, and the GLUP and Cultural Resources cross-cutting additions – be specifically reviewed by the team drafting those sections before the document is finalized. I would also welcome the opportunity to present to the planning team or the Long Range Planning Committee before the window closes.

The Aspen Institute's Project Play has produced community State of Play reports for 16 cities and regions – including Washington DC, our immediate neighbor, in March 2025. These reports have mobilized leaders, shaped policies, and unlocked tens of millions of dollars in grantmaking wherever they have been produced. A State of Play Arlington report would give this county the data foundation to turn the guiding principles language requested in this comment into measurable, accountable commitments. I am in direct contact with Project Play's leadership and would welcome the opportunity to connect the planning team with that conversation.

8. Specific Language Additions Requested

The following additions are proposed to specific sections of the draft guiding principles. In each case, the goal is not to add something new – it is to make existing commitments specific, measurable, and actionable.

4.2 Community Wellbeing – MOST URGENT

Current language commits to *"public spaces, parks, and programs that promote active lifestyles."* This must be made specific.

Arlington names accessible sports and recreation infrastructure – serving youth, families, adults, and communities of all ages – as a documented behavioral health intervention, not

merely a lifestyle amenity, and commits to proactive, equitable access particularly for lower-income families, immigrant communities, and displacement-vulnerable residents. Given Arlington's acute mental health crisis driven by federal job cuts, AI workforce disruption, and economic instability, field access is a community mental health investment the county cannot afford to treat as optional. Arlington will prioritize shared-use public-private partnerships as a mechanism for expanding access without requiring full county capital investment.

5.5 Workforce Opportunity and Economic Mobility

Current language calls for "access to life-long education and training opportunities that match jobs and skills in evolving industries and technologies." Youth sports access belongs here explicitly.

Arlington recognizes that organized youth sports and physical activity programs develop the adaptability, resilience, emotional intelligence, and collaborative capacity that constitute the foundational workforce skills least susceptible to technological displacement. Equitable access to these programs is an economic mobility investment, and Arlington commits to treating field and recreation infrastructure as workforce development infrastructure accordingly.

7.5 Accountable Stewardship of Public Facilities and Infrastructure

Arlington will actively pursue shared-use public-private partnerships as a preferred mechanism for expanding community sports and recreation infrastructure without requiring full county capital investment. Co-location of athletic facilities with educational, residential, and community institutions – funded through private capital with explicit community access requirements – represents the accountable, fiscally responsible stewardship this section calls for.

1.4 Quality Public Amenities, Services, and Infrastructure

Youth sports fields and recreation facilities are essential public amenities that serve community health, workforce development, and mental health outcomes. Arlington commits to treating accessible, equitably distributed sports and recreation infrastructure as a core public amenity on par with other essential community facilities – not as an optional recreational luxury subject to budget pressure.

2.4 Accessible Housing, Services, and Basic Needs

This section already names recreation as a basic need. The definition of equitable access must be strengthened.

Arlington measures equitable recreation access not only by total capacity but by whether lower-income residents, immigrant families, and displacement-vulnerable communities can actually reach and afford participation – measured by proximity, cost, and participation rates by income and geography. The county will document these gaps and report progress toward closing them.

4.7 Health Data and Continuous Improvement

Youth sports participation rates, recreational field access by income and geography, and program affordability metrics are named as health indicators to be tracked, reported, and used to guide equitable planning and investment decisions – alongside traditional healthcare utilization data.

General Land Use Plan – A Cross-Cutting Commitment

The GLUP governs how Arlington designates and prioritizes land for different uses. It currently has no explicit policy framework protecting land for community athletic and recreational use. As development pressure increases – and in Arlington it always does – land without strong policy protection gets converted to higher-density uses. Fields get lost and never come back.

Arlington's guiding principles should direct the General Land Use Plan to explicitly designate accessible community athletic and recreational facilities as a protected land use priority – ensuring that field and recreation space is preserved and expanded as the county grows rather than lost to development pressure. Shared-use parcels that serve both institutional partners and the broader community should be named as a preferred land use designation for properties adjacent to schools, universities, and community facilities.

Historic and Cultural Resources Plan – Living Culture, Not Just Built Heritage

The Historic and Cultural Resources Plan focuses on buildings, landmarks, and artifacts. It has no framework for living cultural practices – the traditions, community rituals, and civic activities that define a community's identity in the present tense. Sports and recreation are living cultural resources. The Bolivian soccer community that has organized in Arlington for decades is a cultural institution as much as any historic building. The gymnastics program at Barcroft that served families for 47 years was not a budget line. It was a living cultural practice. Cutting it was cultural erasure – and the county's foundational policy document had no language to prevent it.

Arlington's guiding principles should direct the Historic and Cultural Resources Plan to expand its framework beyond built heritage to explicitly include living cultural practices – including organized sports traditions, performing arts, recreational leagues, and the community rituals built around them – as cultural resources worthy of policy protection. The erasure of long-standing community sports and arts programs is a form of cultural displacement that belongs in Arlington's equity and preservation framework, not merely its budget process.

From Principles to Commitments – A Note on Implementation

Guiding principles set values. Goals and objectives set targets. I respectfully ask that the planning team ensure any guiding principles language addressing sports and recreation infrastructure is carried forward into specific, measurable goals and objectives when that section of the Comprehensive Plan is updated – so that the values articulated here translate into accountable commitments.

9. Closing

I respectfully request that the County Board direct staff to incorporate the language additions detailed in Section 8 of this comment into the draft guiding principles before final adoption – and that this written comment be formally entered into the Arlington 2050 public record.

Arlington 2050 will be the policy foundation for decisions made in this county for the next 25 years. The decisions of the past five years – cutting programs, raising fees, proposing to eliminate the last 6 percent of drop-in field access, surveying 107 people to set policy for 240,000 residents – were made in a policy environment that treated sports and recreation as optional. This document has the power to change that permanently.

The Public Spaces Master Plan Refresh is running in parallel, with community engagement continuing through fall 2026. The guiding principles adopted through this process will directly inform the PSMP Refresh's Land Acquisition Criteria and Level of Service standards. Getting the guiding principles right this summer is the prerequisite for getting the PSMP Refresh right this fall. The two processes must be aligned, and this is the moment to ensure they are.

This Board has already said what it believes. Board Chair Karantonis named youth mental health as his top priority and pushed the Parks Department to expand teen programming for exactly the crisis Arlington families are living through right now. Board member Spain campaigned on expanding the county's recreational offerings and said directly that Arlington's children need safe places to play. These are not positions this comment is asking the Board to adopt. They are positions the Board has already adopted – publicly, on the record, in their own words. This document is the moment to put them in writing that lasts 25 years.

Arlington 2050 is the once-in-a-generation opportunity to write this understanding into the foundational document. Not in the language of intention. In the language of commitment.

The window is closing. The next window won't open until at least 2050.

Sources

Key research and data cited in this comment:

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