

GRAND THOUGHTS

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN ARLINGTON

Fly into Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport from the north, with the monuments of Washington, D.C. on your left, and gaze down at Arlington, Virginia's Rosslyn-Ballston commercial corridor, one of the country's finest examples of economic development and urban planning.

Passengers at eye level with corporate rooftop signs, the likes of which include BAE Systems, Corporate Executive Board, and Deloitte, can view the gentle tapering of density as compact commercial development transitions into quiet residential streets. Arlington is a mere 26 square miles, but its office market rivals that of downtown Los Angeles, Denver, and Atlanta, and its hip neighborhoods a stone's throw from Washington, D.C. attract a young, creative, and diverse population.

Arlington has been fortunate to enjoy relative prosperity, even as economic troubles have rattled the rest of the nation. In 2008, while communities across the country were grappling with devastating unemployment, rising numbers of home foreclosures, and dwindling local budgets, *Businessweek* named Arlington the best place in the nation to ride

out a recession, citing its highly-educated workforce and the stabilizing presence of the nearby federal government.¹ The following year, *The New York Times* praised Arlington's office and retail markets as "an oasis of stability" and noted the community's ability to attract new tenants, buyers,

and developers with its mixed-use, transit-oriented urban villages.²

More recently, *The Associated Press* ranked Arlington among the five least stressed counties in the nation, the only urban county in the Top 20.³

Clearly, we are doing something right to have buffered ourselves from the difficulties plaguing the rest of the country. But what exactly?

Some of our success can be attributed to being in the right place at the right time. Arlington's location

across the Potomac River from the nation's capital has cushioned it from the greater economy's volatility. As noted by *Businessweek*, the significant federal presence ensured that during the downturn Arlington's buildings remained filled with GSA tenants and government contractors while industry sectors clustered elsewhere in the country (e.g. banking, insurance) flagged.

Arlington Model of Economic Sustainability



¹ "The Best Cities for Riding Out a Recession," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 14 October 2008.

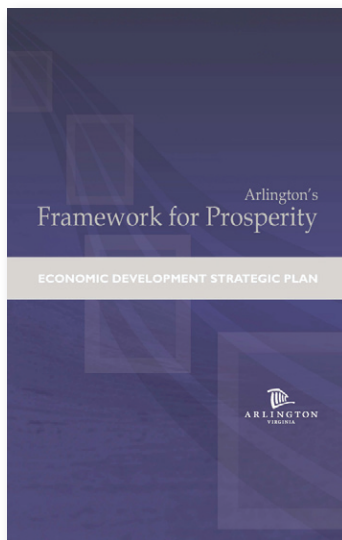
² "An Oasis of Stability Amid a Downturn," *The New York Times*, 7 October 2009, B6.

³ "20 Most Stressed, 20 Least Stressed Counties," *The Associated Press via Forbes.com*, 7 June 2011.

In addition to mere proximity, however, Arlington has been rooted in a culture of planning for over 50 years, guiding development with patient adherence to a plan that concentrated eventually lucrative density along transit lines in the commercial corridors. While other communities were continuing to sprawl, Arlington was ahead of its time, implementing “Smart Growth” principles that have proven to be the building blocks of our renowned urban villages and a model of successful urban growth.

An Opportunity for Analysis

The fact that Arlington has fared so well through the recent economic downturn is not a new phenomenon – during the two previous national recessions Arlington either bounced back faster or actually gained jobs. Beyond just being in the right place at the right time, we asked why were things so good? Our consistently strong economic position is a community asset and, in order to nurture and preserve it, we decided we needed to understand its dynamics



Arlington's economic development strategic plan identified a need to look at economic sustainability.

– specifically what are the components of Arlington's success and what kind of strategy will continue the momentum. Barring such action, our economic future may be vulnerable.

In 2009, the Arlington County Board accepted the Economic Development Commission's strategic plan — “Arlington's Framework

community”, it could not continue to be so without a commitment to aggressively mitigate threats and leverage growth opportunities. Threats to our economic strength were already in play, including the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) mandate to relocate 17,000 defense-related jobs out of leased office space, increased costs of living that impacted the ability to attract younger and lower wage workers, and the growing competition in the office market from Tysons Corner and fast-redeveloping areas of Washington, D.C. Around the same time, the County Board launched a major initiative to promote environmental stewardship, sustainability, and preservation in Arlington. While this initiative primarily encompassed “green” efforts – boosting existing environmental programs and establishing a new community energy task force – the spotlight on sustainability also opened the door to explore what needed to be done to ensure Arlington's future economic well-being. With the support of the County Board and the impetus for such work already articulated in “Arlington's Framework for Prosperity”, the Economic Development Commission added “economic sustainability” to its agenda and began an investigation into the dynamics and interrelated web of factors that produce ongoing economic prosperity.

Developing an Arlington Model

What is economic sustainability? It is an emergent system with countless interrelated moving parts, but who knew that at first!? We did know that it was a complex puzzle and, to get our arms around the concept, we would have to think big and broadly and not expect there to be one definable, measurable outcome. Research of economic sustainability models from other communities found that while pieces here and there were relevant to Arlington, no one turnkey approach was entirely appropriate for our economy and community.

As a result, we decided to develop our own model. Three interwoven themes – innovation, resiliency, and competitiveness – emerged as strengths and

appeared to be fundamental characteristics of economic sustainability in Arlington. But while this model gave us some insight into the big picture, we recognized a need to drill down further to know more at a practical level what was making Arlington's economy so successful. Clearly, it would be critical to determine what specific dynamics were supporting continued sustainability so that we could identify actionable steps to maintain it. On further analysis we reviewed Arlington's strengths and opportunities. It was apparent there was more to Arlington than valuable real estate and federal employment. In addition to its thriving economy, Arlington had also received numerous awards for innovation and value delivery in areas such as technology, human services, communications, and transportation, to name a few. We recognized that we needed to look at our strengths more holistically.

The result of this holistic examination represents a new way of thinking about Arlington's economy. While government and community stakeholders tend to rely on standard economic indicators (e.g. unemployment rates, trends in home sales, tax receipts, etc.) to assess the characteristics of their economy, we have expanded our scope to include a value-based interpretation of how the economy and the overall community are performing. This broader view represents a more comprehensive, interconnected means of holding conversations and allows diverse stakeholders to find common ground and explore sustainability from a neutral platform. In fact, our ideas may just be "Grand Thoughts".

We have been reaching out to strategic thinkers and soliciting feedback about the "Grand Thoughts" we have developed thus far. Not only has the model been well-received as a way of framing economic sustainability in an accessible and understandable way, but the "Grand Thoughts" have resonated and demonstrated their value and applicability across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Exploring the Grand Thoughts

We developed 20 "Grand Thoughts" as concise "Tweetable" statements in order to keep them succinct and easy to understand. Not all 20 "Thoughts" will be pertinent to every discussion, nor will they necessarily be equally important – it all depends on the issue in question. The "Thoughts" are hard to order, and while we have attempted numerous times to group them into logical categories, significant overlap between them has made it all but impossible. Below is a brief explanation of each "Thought", followed by an example of its relevance in Arlington. The "Grand Thoughts" are still under development and continue to be fine-tuned as we test their validity.

BEWARE OF GREENWASHING:

Understand that there is more to economic sustainability than "green business".

"Green businesses" thrive in communities with strong environmental values, in which offering "green" products/services and employing sustainable business practices serves as a competitive business advantage. Businesses may also utilize innovative methods to reduce the costs of "going green".

Envirocab, the nation's first all-hybrid taxicab company, found a market niche in Arlington due



Envirocab's "green" taxi fleet has found a market niche in Arlington.

to the strong political and community support for “green” business practices. While the company does not maintain hard data to support its findings, its owner reports that customers often “skip the line” to ride in one of the fleet’s fuel-efficient, low-emission vehicles, even if it means passing by other companies’ hybrid vehicles.

KEEP IT LOCAL:

Value local businesses which generate more economic activity and are vested in and reflective of the community.

Local businesses generate as much as 2-3 times the local economic activity as national chains.⁴ They typically employ local residents, including the administrative positions that chains often centralize at corporate offices. They are also more likely to purchase goods and services from other local businesses, helping revenue continue to circulate through the economy and creating a multiplier effect which boosts overall economic impact. While they may not always be able to compete on price, they differentiate themselves by getting to know customers, understanding which products and services are in demand locally, and providing the type of customer service often found lacking in national chain stores.

Over 60 percent of Arlington retailers are small, locally-owned businesses competing head-to-head with national brands. Clarendon’s Kinder Haus Toys carries some of the popular products found at Toys R Us, but also focuses on specialty educational toys that appeal to the surrounding demographic. The store is dedicated to the community, donating to local causes, participating in neighborhood events, and welcoming families for weekly children’s activities.

BEYOND THE BALANCE SHEET:

Include the consideration of social and environmental factors in the calculation of profit.

“Triple bottom line” or “total cost” accounting recognizes the broader value and impact of contributing to the community, operating in underserved areas, and protecting the environment. Sixty-four percent of executives surveyed say that corporate citizenship produces a tangible contribution to the company bottom line through brand awareness, consumer loyalty, and increased employee retention; among executives at large companies, 84 percent see direct bottom-line benefits.⁵

In April 2011, the Arlington Chamber of Commerce celebrated its 12th Annual Volunteer Arlington Day with over 100 business participants providing support to local non-profits. Acknowledging its commitment to the community and the importance of supporting such an event, a Booz Allen Hamilton senior vice president emphasized the company’s “strong tradition of service [and] a world-class workforce dedicated not only to their clients, but to their families, friends and community ... We are part of the Arlington community as people and a business, and we’re proud to serve in, and sponsor, Volunteer Arlington Day.”⁶

MEASURE WHAT REALLY MATTERS:

Benchmark and track measures that reflect the community’s values.

The literature on sustainability is chockfull of quantitative and qualitative measures. But there is also a need for measures that focus on outcomes and results that are meaningful in Arlington that broaden the discussion, and uncover a realm of

⁴ “Thinking Outside the Box: A Report on Independent Merchants and the New Orleans Economy,” *The Urban Conservancy in partnership with Civic Economics*, September 2009.

⁵ Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College and Business Civic Leadership Center, 2005.

⁶ “Volunteers Spirits Undaunted by Weekend Rain,” *The Sun Gazette - Arlington*, 18 April 2011.

potential community benefits that might otherwise be overlooked.

Arlington is both environmentally- and health-conscious. While many communities use traffic counts and other standard transportation indicators to extrapolate the impacts of congested roadways, Arlington County Commuter Services' "Car-Free Diet" program measures its efforts to reduce vehicle usage in a different way. The program's online calculator illustrates how replacing one or more driving trips each week with biking, walking, transit or telework can help individuals save money, burn calories, and reduce carbon emissions. As individuals log their (lack of) vehicle usage and calculate their "savings", Commuter Services tracks vehicle miles reduced, vehicle trips reduced, pounds of carbon dioxide reduced, and gallons of gasoline saved.

DYNAMIC DIVERSITY:

Welcome the constant flow of diverse people and ideas as a competitive strength.

Communities that embrace diverse ideas tend to be more inclusive, open to risk-taking, and adaptable to change. With a broad mix of perspectives, they



Arlington has a dense and diverse mix of real estate.

are able to better understand the complexities and nuances of issues and make more informed decisions. Diversity also means the physical diversity of land uses and activities in the community. Communities that offer diversity in housing, employment, real estate, and transportation are better positioned to take advantage of future opportunities.

Arlington's economy benefits from a diverse mix of commercial and residential real estate. While commercial properties account for only 11 percent of Arlington's land area, they account for 46 percent of its tax base and helped stabilize the local economy during the 2006-2010 decline of residential property values. Current data continues to demonstrate diversity's importance: while 2011 residential values have improved slightly by 1.4 percent, overall property values are up 6.3 percent largely due to a 12 percent rebound in the commercial sector. Arlington has traditionally had one of the lowest real estate tax rates in Northern Virginia, and its FY 2012 Adopted Budget maintains the current tax rate while fully funding increased student enrollment in Arlington Public Schools and County operating increases. Diversity in commercial real estate has also enabled Arlington to attract and accommodate a broad mix of tenants, including private companies, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

TALENT TOWN:

Provide amenities and a cultural climate that attract a creative, talented, and innovative workforce.

Economist Richard Florida theorizes that communities with higher concentrations of "creative class"⁷ workers – young, highly-educated, scientific, "artsy" types – are generally more economically successful than communities lacking such talent. To attract these individuals, communities must provide the types of amenities they desire,

⁷ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

including a mix of shopping and dining options, cultural venues, recreational opportunities, nightlife, and more.

Close to Washington, D.C. and the site of numerous government contractors, Arlington is already home to many of the scientific and research-oriented professionals that Florida considers members of the “creative class”. Besides proximity to their work, these individuals enjoy Arlington’s accessibility, lively neighborhoods, diverse restaurants, nightlife, parks, and other amenities. The County continues its commitment to providing these types of amenities, most recently with its renovation of the former Newseum space into the Artisphere, a unique arts and entertainment venue that offers over 100 theatre, film, dance, music and visual arts events each month.

DON'T WORRY ... BE HAPPY:

Maximize individual productivity; promote health and well-being.

Economically sustainable communities and businesses foster the well-being of residents and workers in a variety of ways. They provide open space and recreational facilities, they help employees achieve work-life balance, and they offer safety net services to protect the most vulnerable individuals.

The Arlington Free Clinic is a nonprofit organization that provides basic health care services to low-income, uninsured people in the community. The community’s commitment to the Clinic is evident, with private donations accounting for nearly all of its \$2.3 million operating budget. In 2009, the Clinic relocated to a new owned space along Columbia Pike which, thanks to in-kind donations of design and engineering services, represents the first free clinic in the nation to receive the prestigious LEED-CI⁸ Gold certification.⁹

EVERYBODY CONTRIBUTES TO INNOVATION:

Encourage a culture that welcomes innovation from all.

Successful businesses and communities recognize that creative ideas and new approaches to old ways can come from anywhere and anyone. Those that recognize individual potential and seek input and contributions from a diverse mix of people are more likely to succeed.



Participants in Arlington’s culinary training program build job skills.

Arlington strives to empower its residents and workforce, recognizing that regardless of background, experience or education, everyone has something to contribute. Its 16-week Culinary Job Training program, a partnership with D.C. Central Kitchen, prepares unemployed, underemployed, previously incarcerated persons, and homeless adults for careers in the foodservice industry. The 2009 class included 81 graduates, 80 percent of whom obtained employment upon graduation.¹⁰

⁸ Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design – Commercial Interior.

⁹ Arlington Free Clinic, <http://www.arlingtonfreeclinic.org>, July 2011.

¹⁰ D.C. Central Kitchen, <http://www.dccentralkitchen.org/culinary-job-training.php>, July 2011.

NOT-SO-STRANGE BEDFELLOWS:

Realize that business and government share responsibility for long-term success.

Although business and government sometimes appear at odds over taxes and regulations, they share the same goal of prosperity. As government learns how to regulate without inhibiting innovation and growth, and business realizes that social and financial contributions not only enrich the community, but also enhance their bottom line, the foundation for long-term success is formed.

Child care has become a key factor in a location decision for many companies. When National Cooperative Bank (NCB) was looking to move into Arlington from Washington, D.C., it sought a building with on-site child care. While provider Bright Horizons was prepared to open a new facility on the building's first floor, a vocal minority constituency protested the center's use of an adjacent easement (used as a popular recreational area) for its outdoor play area. Ultimately, a compromise was struck in which one of three volleyball courts on the site would be removed (and located elsewhere in the County) and the Bright Horizons playground would be open to the public after hours, weekends, and on federal holidays. Bright Horizons operates today not only serving NCB's working parents, but also providing an additional child care option for the greater community.

GOOD BONES:

Invest in infrastructure that supports a high quality of urban life.

Communities and businesses need to regularly invest in infrastructure to stay competitive; otherwise, communities with better schools, newer facilities, more accessible transit, etc., will start to lure population and employers. "Smart" and future-oriented infrastructure, including new communications technologies, advancements in energy management, and eco-friendly resource optimization, are priority investments for long-term sustainability.

Arlington County Government and Schools currently rely on a Comcast-constructed and -maintained fiber-based network to access computer services, send e-mail, and make intra-county telephone calls free of charge. However, a rise in service failures, increasing demand on a congested network, and the need to reduce dependency on the cable provider have resulted in a telecommunications initiative to leverage any and all opportunities to deploy government-owned dark fiber, i.e. unused fiber that can be incorporated at reduced cost during the installation of infrastructure projects. By investing for the future, the County and Schools will benefit from increased shared synergies, independence from Comcast, the flexibility to reroute traffic as needed, and the ability to scale for and accommodate future capacity.

HAVE A THERE, THERE:

Be a place where people want to be, a place worth caring about, and a place that can't be mistaken for anywhere else.

Whether on the scale of New York City or Main Street, there are opportunities to capitalize on existing assets to become special "there" places. These places draw people in through activity, bustle, and a general sense of knowing you can experience something authentic when you visit. These are places where people have emotional connections.



Crystal Couture attracts fashionistas from all over D.C. to participate in trunk shows, pop-up shops and runway extravaganzas.

With a substantial office presence and a lesser amount of residential units clustered in high-rise buildings, Crystal City used to be known as the area of Arlington that buzzed during the day, but became a ghost town after five o'clock. With the formation of a Business Improvement District (BID) and efforts by the property owners to activate the area's retail, Crystal City has taken on a new identity as one of the region's most exciting destinations. Regular events and programming – from 5k races with after parties at local bars and restaurants to funky art exhibits and outdoor film festivals – encourage people to visit the area. Crystal City has become a round-the-clock “go to” place.

THE ANCHOR AND THE SAIL:

Recognize that institutions provide economic stability and are catalysts for innovation.

Large, well-rooted institutions contribute to the economy and the community in a number of ways. First, people correlate the place with the activity, e.g. people associate university communities with an educated workforce, cultural amenities, and a stimulating learning environment. Second, these institutions tend to be prominent employers and are not as likely to be as disrupted by fluctuating market conditions. Third, they are places in which bright minds meet, exchange ideas, make new discoveries, and foster economic activity.

Arlington has a major asset in the nearby federal government (and its contractors), which not only provides stability as an employer and tenant, but also nurtures innovation through its funding of research and development projects. However, communities do not need a presence as significant as the federal government to be valued as an “anchor and sail”. Other types of institutions, including hospitals, airports, universities, historic attractions, and cultural districts can provide similar economic benefits.

WHAT GOES UP SHOULD STAY UP:

Adopt flexible planning and development policies that protect the future value of real estate.

The built environment has to be adaptable and competitive to capitalize on future opportunities. Thus, land use decisions must be forward-thinking and progressive so that real estate values always have the potential to increase. Community engagement should be used to allow for changes in use and density in appropriate locations and to accommodate innovative approaches to development.

Arlington is hoping to stimulate redevelopment but still preserve the character of the Columbia Pike corridor, one of its busiest and most diverse urban villages, with the implementation of Form-Based Code (FBC). An alternative to conventional zoning, FBC defines the physical envelope of buildings and their relationship to the streetscape while allowing considerable leeway in use. As long as they adhere to basic urban design guidelines, developers have flexibility in the ultimate function of the space. FBC-applicants are offered an expedited approval process designed to incentivize Columbia Pike's revitalization.



Form-Based Code is designed to revitalize Columbia Pike while still preserving its unique character.

STAY ON TOP:

Maintain competitive advantage and be recognized for it.

Branding your community and business is important. Smart people and smart companies want to be where “cool” and innovative things are taking place. The goal is to accomplish these sorts of things and then be able to tell the world about it.

With tourism research showing a decline in the use of traditional visitor centers, the Arlington Convention and Visitors Service decided to raise the bar, scrap the old model, and get creative in providing visitors information where they need it most – out and about. Its Segway®-riding “Rolling Concierges” can be found all summer long in Crystal City using “on-board” computers and cell phones to direct guests to local restaurants, shops, and attractions. Arlington’s new Mobile Visitors Center, the first of its kind in the country, serves visitors from March through November near six Arlington Metro stations and at major tourism events. The customized electric-powered vehicle has wireless capability and integrated technology to provide a total on-the-go visitor center experience, has served 44 percent more visitors than the storefront facility,



Arlington’s Mobile Visitors Center is an innovative way of providing visitors service.

and was recently recognized as Virginia’s 2011 *Visitor Center of the Year*.

HAVE A PLAN B:

Formulate contingency plans and operational strategies in case of disruption.

Disruptions to business operations can cause physical injury, damage property, and harm the organization’s public image. Having a continuity of operations plan enables businesses to assess their capabilities, direct staff, and work with local governments to determine how they can best provide and receive assistance in an emergency.

Arlington companies are preparing for whatever comes their way with the Office of Emergency Management’s “Emergency Table-Top Exercises”. The innovative program brings businesses and building owners together to role-play through realistic scenarios and share contingency plans with experts in a confidential setting. Exercises reveal where participants’ assumptions can clash with real-life considerations and help businesses and individuals develop more effective plans for emergency response, communication, and cooperation with first responders.¹¹

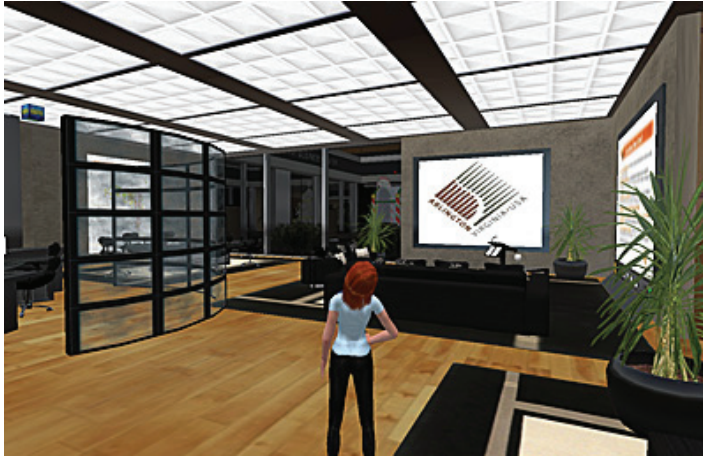
THE JETSONS’ 9-5:

Prepare for future forms of collaborative workspace.

From mobile applications to cyberspace meetings, the modern workplace has expanded well beyond the traditional office environment. However, even with advancements in technology, collaboration is still essential for innovation and must be accommodated in future workspace.

Arlington Economic Development is already exploring possibilities for future collaborative workspace through its cyber office within the vir-

¹¹ Boeing Hosts Tabletop Event, Rosslyn Magazine, Spring 2011, 17.



A guest visits AED's "Second Life" office.

tual world, "Second Life". Its glass-enclosed office mirrors the "real world" suite with marketing materials and information on economic trends available for visitors to peruse. Business prospects can meet with economic development officials, learn about County programs and incentives, and view online presentations on an interactive white board. Employers such as the National Science Foundation have expressed how much they value being in such a progressive community.

G+P+U=GPU³:

Leverage government, private sector, and university alliances for exponential results.

Effective partnerships can be a powerful means of leveraging resources and generating dynamic synergies. They enable participants to showcase their respective strengths while increasing individual capacity through partnership with organizations that have complementary competencies. Successful partnerships have a shared vision, a clear structure that outlines each participant's commitment, a defined timeline, and mutual accountability for the project.

The Center for Community Security and Resilience, an advanced research lab designed to create homeland security and crisis mitigation applications, is a partnership between Arlington County, Virginia Tech, and IBM. Arlington contributes by providing an ideal urban test bed environment and benefits by being the location for the Center's work. Virginia Tech establishes an internationally-recognized center, creates synergies with other Arlington-based research organizations, and attracts world-class academic and private-sector talent. IBM brings its real world data usage and benefits by having a "living laboratory" to advance its research initiatives and promote its capabilities to commercial partners.¹²

TECHNOLOGY'S 21ST CENTURY GARAGE:

Promote and support a culture of entrepreneurship. Encourage tinkering and risk-taking.

From humble beginnings in a backyard shed, Henry Ford revolutionized the automobile industry. Today's inventors and entrepreneurs have the potential to realize equally-extraordinary innovations, provided they have the opportunities and support of an entrepreneurial environment that enables their talents to flourish.

Arlington's Frampton Ellis designed his naturally-contoured shoe sole to mimic the bare foot and increase the stability of athletic shoes. The patented design was licensed by Adidas America and served as the technology behind the company's popular "Feet You Wear" line. Before a contract dispute severed the parties' relationship, Ellis' design was incorporated into shoes worn by athletes Kobe Bryant and Steffi Graf as part of Adidas America's largest-ever advertising campaign.¹³

¹² Center for Community Security and Resilience (CCSR): Overview, DHS University Network Summit, 10 March 2010.

¹³ Inventors Network of the Capital Area, <http://www.dcinventors.org>, July 2011.

IMPOSSIBLE → IMPROBABLE → INEVITABLE:
Nurture innovation because what appears to be impossible, ultimately will be inevitable.

Places that value innovation are magnets for cutting-edge research that strives to achieve the impossible and produce “great leap”-type breakthroughs. These are places where individuals take on the most challenging and inconceivable science – the most complex and risky projects – and make groundbreaking discoveries.

As the Department of Defense’s (DoD) primary innovation engine, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) undertakes projects that are finite in duration, but that create lasting revolutionary change.¹⁴ It is the kind of place where top talent from universities and the private sector come together with the brightest military minds to achieve the sort of futuristic science unimaginable to most people. While DARPA’s underlying mission is to maintain the U.S. military’s technological superiority, its genius has also made its way into the civilian realm. The



Board Chairman Chris Zimmerman honors developers of the ARPANET, the predecessor to the Internet.

ARPANET¹⁵, a 1970s DARPA project, was the precursor to the Internet, while DARPA’s joint efforts with other DoD research agencies to develop a more precise Cold War era navigational system evolved into today’s Global Positioning System (GPS) technology.

SMART STAYS SMART:
Strive to be an informed community that embraces change. Have responsible conversations.

An educated and diverse community that welcomes new ideas and feels its input is valued can more easily adapt to change and embrace new ways of doing things. When businesses have an open dialogue with community stakeholders, the local government is better positioned to identify opportunities and facilitate partnerships and initiatives that support them.

Arlington has a nationally-recognized tradition of being a very active and engaged community, embracing a model of participatory democracy in an institutionalized system of civic participation known as the “Arlington Way”. The formal structure of the “Arlington Way” includes over 40 Citizen Advisory Groups and Commissions, while the informal manifestation is a transparent government and a shared philosophy of cooperation between the government and the community. However, the model has not kept pace with changing demographics and technology that have altered, and in some ways limited, the way in which the community engages with the government. Efforts to provide accessible and accurate information, engage a wider and more representative group of residents and organizations, and support Arlington’s leadership with reliable and credible data to help in decision-making, are currently being explored as means of improving the “Arlington Way”.¹⁶

¹⁴ Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, <http://www.darpa.mil>, July 2011.

¹⁵ At the time of the ARPANET, DARPA was known as the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA).

¹⁶ Creating the Arlington E-Way: Enhancing & Improving Community Engagement, 2011.

Looking Ahead

Our work to date is just the beginning. We now understand that economic sustainability is an emergent system and what “defines” it will always be in flux, particularly as innovation takes us in new and unimaginable directions. The “Grand Thoughts” illustrate some of the characteristics of Arlington’s success thus far, and while they seem to resonate with many, we may add more in order to paint a complete picture of why Arlington is sustainable

or how to transform these big ideas into actionable steps and policy recommendations. We know they represent a new way of thinking about our economy and can help us reflect on our community in a more holistic way. Our next steps will focus on refining the Arlington model by applying it to current issues and opportunities before the County and using it as an economic sustainability lens to evaluate new initiatives. We also hope to learn whether our approach is limited to Arlington or whether there are broader, more universal applications for other communities.

This paper was prepared by Jennie Gordon, Special Projects Manager, Arlington Economic Development.