

THE VILLAGE OF **SHIRLINGTON**

**SUBURBAN SMART GROWTH
WITHOUT RAIL TRANSIT**



UPDATED JULY 2018

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Introduction

Shirlington, Virginia, is an example of planned smart growth development for lower-density suburban communities that lack the resources or scale to support rail transit. While Arlington is known for its transit-oriented development, Shirlington is a smart growth story that can be replicated anywhere lacking rail transit.

The transformation of Shirlington is proof that suburban communities can build efficient, walkable, mixed-use centers. Shirlington can help inform important planning issues that many communities are working to address, particularly increasing density and transit accessibility among existing low-density neighborhoods. This case offers important lessons on how public investment can leverage substantial private sector investment through partnership. Finally, Shirlington illustrates how Arlington has used citizen engagement to help shape development and build support for densities that often get struck down by political opposition before they are even understood.

After multiple decades of decline, creative, continuous planning efforts have transformed Shirlington into a vibrant arts and entertainment district, drawing people throughout the metropolitan area to restaurants and retail along its main street and to its theaters and cinemas.



Shirlington and Campbell Avenue, I-395 in the background

Suburban land-use planners struggle to implement smart growth principles for a variety of reasons. In some places, the market will not support the level of development densities required to justify rail service. In others, the development densities needed to support rail transit can't be accomplished due to environmental limitations or political reasons. However, communities can still achieve smart growth, creating walkable, mixed-use cores, while maintaining their suburban character and relying primarily on access by car.

Principles of Smart Growth

The 10 principles of smart growth, which provide the framework for many planning efforts in Arlington County, including the redevelopment of Shirlington:

1. Mix land uses;
2. Take advantage of compact building design;
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices;
4. Create walkable neighborhoods;
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
6. Preserve open space, natural beauty, and critical environment areas;
7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities;
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices;
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective;
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Source: Smart Growth Online, <https://smartgrowth.org>

Background

About Arlington



Rosslyn-Ballston corridor in 2010

Arlington County, Virginia is a geographically small but dense urban community, with a population of 222,800 and more than 222,300 jobs. Located just across the Potomac River and to the west of Washington, D.C., the County was originally established in 1847, but wasn't named Arlington until 1920.

Officially, Arlington is a county, but it operates as a unified local government, providing all of the services typically provided by both a county and a city. Neighborhoods and commercial areas within Arlington include Shirlington, Crystal City, Rosslyn, Ballston, Columbia Pike, Pentagon City and Clarendon, none of which are independent political entities.



APA award received in 2017

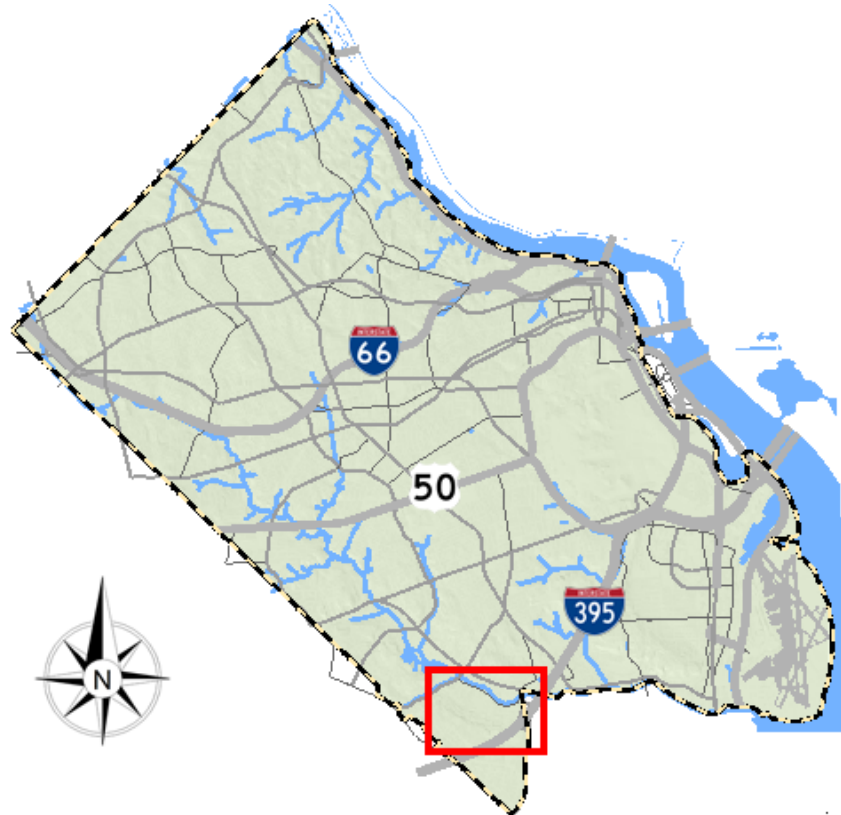
Arlington is internationally recognized for its smart growth efforts, having won awards from the Environmental Protection Agency, the American Planning Association and others. These awards grew out of planning efforts in the 1960s and 1970s when Arlington was facing population decline and commercial disinvestment. To stop the decline, Arlington created a dramatic new land-use plan for a series of "urban villages" along the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor of the newly constructed Washington Metrorail system.

Since the redevelopment of the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor in the 1970s, Arlington's planning efforts have been firmly rooted in smart growth principles and practices. Arlington's urban villages have come to define smart growth in much of the Washington area and beyond, using a formula of high density, mixed-use development within one-quarter mile of high-quality rail service. Shirlington, however, was one of several commercial areas in Arlington not served by Metrorail.

Thus, the challenge: How does a car-oriented community such as Shirlington create smart growth?

About Shirlington

The subject area is a community known as Shirlington; a car-oriented, former shopping center in Arlington County, Virginia. Shirlington draws its name from the Shirley Memorial Highway (Interstate 395, the Virginia expressway into Washington, D.C.) that forms its eastern boundary combined with "Arlington." From a planning perspective, Shirlington is a 27-acre site that has received upwards of \$225 million in public and private investment.



Location of Shirlington within Arlington County

Retail runs the length of the main street, Campbell Avenue, and extends for about a half block or less at three intersections that cross the main street. On one end, the development is anchored by WETA studios. On the opposite end of Shirlington, Campbell Avenue terminates with the highly-recognized Signature Theatre, a public library and plaza, along with an LED art installation that draws people down the main street.

To support these restaurants and shops are more than 1,000 apartments and condominiums, a 142-room hotel, and over 500,000 sq. ft. of office space.

Historical Evolution of Shirlington

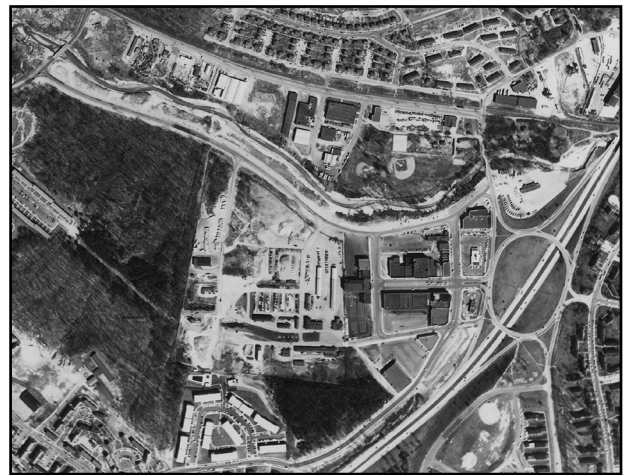
Shirlington began as a suburban shopping center, moving through three separate efforts to stimulate sustainable redevelopment. Tracing the evolution of Shirlington through the various planning and regulatory stages is important because it demonstrates how suburban redevelopment efforts take time and may be frustrated by a lack of success. The plans over time show an increase in permitted density, as well as increasing diversity of uses on the site, both of which contributed to Shirlington's ultimate success.

The history of Shirlington can be understood in four phases:

- 1940 – 1976: Suburban Shopping Center, from Thriving to Declining
- 1976 – 1982: Redevelopment Lost
- 1982 – 2000: Redevelopment Started and Stalled
- 2000 – Today: The Right Plan at the Right Time



1934



1957



1989



2018

1940 – 1976: Suburban Shopping Center, from Thriving to Declining

The former swampland was originally developed by Joe Cherner, a local car dealer who had seen a downturn in sales because of World War II. His original goal for the site was to turn it into an airport, which required 200,000 cubic yards of fill to bring the site up to its current elevation. Ultimately, plans for the airport were never approved. In 1942, construction began on the shopping center, which later opened in 1944.

The shopping center, which had a number of stores and a movie theater, was a success. It was located in close proximity to Fairlington, a development of 3,500 homes built by the Defense Homes Agency, and Park Fairfax, another early-1940s residential development. These two neighborhoods – a mix of single-family homes, townhouses and apartments that extend into the City of Alexandria – provided sufficient traffic for this low-density, strip-style shopping center.

Shirlington thrived in the 1950s and was referred to as a new downtown for the rapidly expanding Washington suburbs. In 1959, Lansburgh's, a large department store, opened in Shirlington, providing a strong retail anchor for the shopping center.

Shirlington began to decline when the neighboring City of Alexandria's Landmark Shopping Mall opened in 1965. Lansburgh's closed in 1973 and was replaced by Best Department Store, which closed itself in 1998. As retailers left the shopping center or went out of business, stores frequently remained vacant.



Shirlington in the 1940s



I-395 in the 1950s, Shirlington in background

1976 – 1982: Redevelopment Lost



Quincy Street in the early 1970s

By 1976, Shirlington was suffering decline like many parts of the region and was not targeted for rail service. As new urban villages were developed along Metrorail corridors, Arlington saw the need to revitalize Shirlington.

Taking a lesson from land-use strategies implemented along rail corridors, new zoning designations with density incentives were approved. The site was rezoned from C-2 (low-density general commercial zoning) to C-O-1.5, which permits office and commercial uses, including restaurants, retail, theaters, hotels with meeting rooms and community facilities at a floor-to-area (FAR) ratio of 1.5.



Aerial photo taken in 1974

By this time, Shirlington was under mostly single ownership and contained multiple parcels that would be developed over time. In order to facilitate the gradual development, a tool called a Phased Development Site Plan (PDSP) was adopted. A PDSP establishes land uses, densities, building heights, parking requirements, utilities, community facilities and other elements of multiple projects within a defined geographical area. While the individual buildings are all subject to final site plan approval by the County Board, prior agreement on many of the elements of a PDSP makes final approval a faster process. The benefit of the PDSP is that it provides more certainty for both the neighborhood and the developer so that market opportunities can be seized when they arise.



A model of the 1976 PDSP

In 1976, local architect Arthur Cotton Moore proposed a PDSP that featured an array of mixed-use structures with a variety of building heights. These structures would form a crescent shape around a 22-story building overlooking a plaza and lake, resembling the Lake Anne development in Reston, Virginia. Of the proposed 2 million square feet of density, the plan designated 85 percent as residential, 10 percent retail and 5 percent office space. The 1976 plan eventually expired without being implemented.

1982 – 2000: Redevelopment Started and Stalled

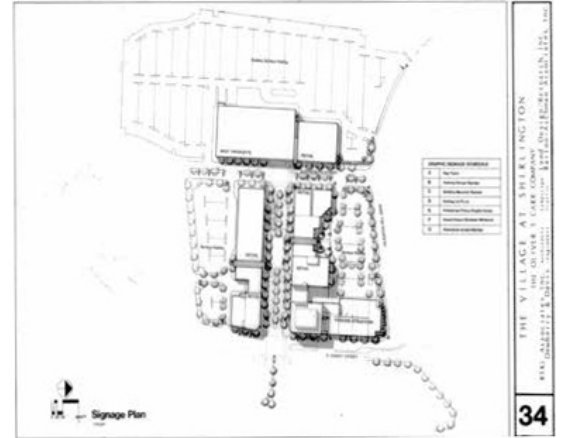
In 1982, the County adopted a new PDSP, which was more successful than the 1976 plan, but eventually floundered as well. *The Village at Shirlington PDSP* laid the foundation for the first major redevelopment of the old shopping center and continues to guide Shirlington’s development today.

The 1982 plan divided the site into five different parcels and proposed a total of 1 million sq. ft. of office and retail development; 600,000 sq. ft. for office and 400,000 sq. ft. for retail. It also added 300 hotel rooms, 490 residential units and 3,000 parking spaces. Out of the proposed development, 51 percent of retail, 68 percent of office space and 82 percent of residential units were constructed.

A central change resulting from the 1982 plan was the creation of a main street for Shirlington: Campbell Avenue (previously South 28th Street). While this created more of a “core” for the community than the original strip mall, there still wasn’t enough residential density to support the area’s businesses, and the site saw significant retail turnover.

A 404-unit apartment building was built and the theater and library were relocated to a more central location, but this density was still not enough to support a thriving retail and restaurant center.

Minor amendments were made to the PDSP throughout the 1990s, but without much of an impact. Shirlington looked inviting and had a nice, walkable scale, but there simply wasn’t enough going on to make it economically sustainable.



Cover of the 1982 Village at Shirlington PDSP



Campbell Avenue in the 1990s

2000 to Today: The Right Plan at the Right Time



Layout of the 2000 PDSP

By this time, Federal Realty Investment Trust acquired the Village of Shirlington, becoming its fourth owner since the 1982 PDSP. The Rockville, Maryland-based company saw Shirlington as an underused asset and began looking at possible scenarios for redevelopment.

The 2000 PDSP, a major amendment to the 1982 plan, took four years to complete, including extensive public review and the creation of a citizen advisory group composed of residents from the surrounding neighborhoods. From the outset, the Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development and Arlington Economic Development lead the effort on the County side.

In 2000, an amendment was proposed to reduce retail by 35 percent, and increase residential units by 40 percent and office development by 2 percent.

The goal of these adjustments were to:

- increase the daytime population of the Village;
- support non-restaurant retail services;
- establish a critical mass of users and retailers;
- create a synergy of activity;
- creating a walkable, mixed-use community.



Theater, library and plaza complex

The 2000 PDSP amendment created a strategy for better integrating Shirlington into the surrounding community by building on characteristics that make Shirlington a unique and special place – active, street-front retail, an appropriate mix of office, residential and hotel development, various sources of entertainment, a civic presence in the form of the library and a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere.



Shirlington, looking east from I-395

The 2000 PDSP amendments sought to bring Shirlington more density with improved amenities so that its potential could be achieved and sustained. This resulted in the following changes to proposed development densities:

- Increased the total land area of the site to 27.23 acres, including the County's contribution of 2.4 acres from its Trade Center site;
- Increased proposed office density to a total of 580,626 sq. ft. of office space;
- Decreased retail to a proposed total density of 279,959 sq. ft.;
- Increased proposed hotel density to 449 hotel rooms;
- Increased proposed residential density to 804 rental and condominium units;
- Increased the total number of parking space to 3,245.

New Development – Proposed vs. Completed, between 1982 and 2000 PDSPs

PDSP (Proposed vs. Built)	Retail (sq. ft.)	Office (sq. ft.)	Hotel Rooms	Residential Units	Parking
1982 PDSP (Proposed)	428,000	570,000	300	490	1,940
1982 PDSP (Built)	219,152	385,626	299	404	1,745
2000 PDSP (Proposed Add'l)	52,500	195,000	150	400	2,315
2000 PDSP (New Built)	60,807	195,000	142	644	1,500
Total Built	279,959	580,626	441	1,048	3,245



241-unit Delancy apartment building

Between 2000 and 2018, development was incremental with the construction of residential dwellings, offices and hotel buildings.

Some of the core private investment includes:

- The Delancy, a 241-unit apartment building
- Io Piazza, a 244-unit condominium building
- Shirlington Village, a 149-unit condo building
- A 45-unit apartment building with retail space
- A 9-unit building with luxury lofts

In 2006, the County Board approved site plans for an office building on the corner of Campbell Avenue and South Randolph Street. The building, completed in March 2009, has 195,000 sq. ft. of office space occupied by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Federal Credit Union and 16,472 sq. ft. of ground-floor retail area.



Hilton Garden Inn, completed in 2009

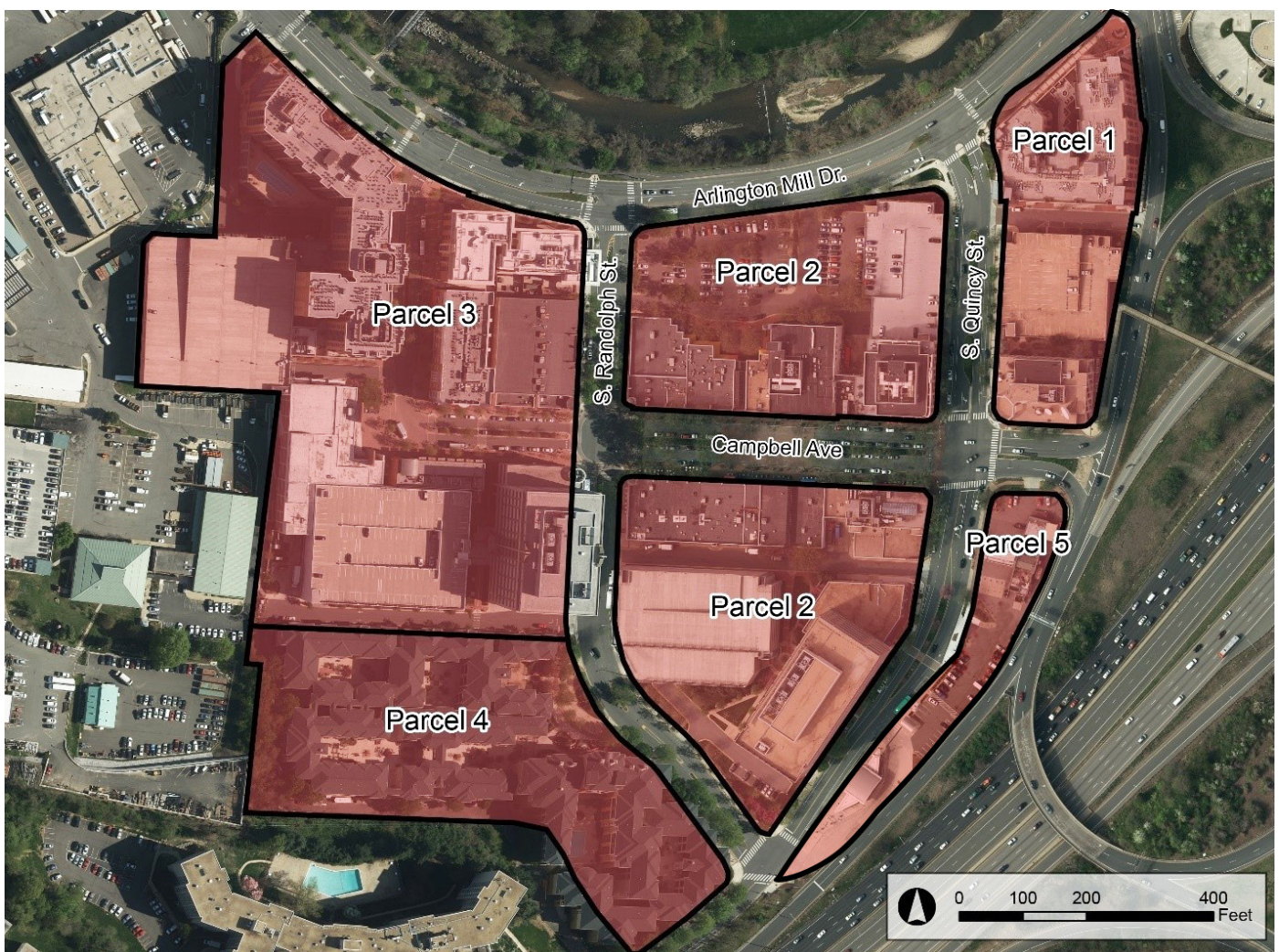
In 2007, Federal Realty was able to find a developer willing to build out a hotel building prior to having commitment from a particular hotel company. A six-story, 142-room hotel with 145 parking spaces was constructed on the north side of the site across from the Four-Mile Run trail. Completed in December of 2009, the hotel is currently a Hilton Garden Inn.

Density Calculations

The Shirlington PDSP has been amended numerous times since its 1982 approval. Since then, the County Board has approved reallocations of uses as well as modifications that allow particular uses to be excluded from density calculations. The entire 27.23-acre site is zoned "C-O-1.5," a designation that allows mixed uses and applies one of the following density calculations, depending on the use:

- Floor area ratio or FAR (gross floor area of all buildings on a parcel divided by the parcel area); or
- Units per acre.

This map breaks the Shirlington PDSP down into five distinct parcels:



Shirlington PDSP site divided into five separate parcels

With site plan approval, office and commercial uses are allowed up to a maximum of 1.5 FAR, multi-family residential is allowed up to 72 dwelling units per acre and hotel uses are allowed up to 110 rooms per acre. Section 7.11.3.F of the Zoning Ordinance includes an additional provision related to density for “C-O-1.5” projects:

§7.11.3.F

“Restaurants, theaters, hotel meeting rooms and community facilities and uses may be permitted and exceed the permitted densities by site plan approval, provided any reduction in required parking shall follow special study of their related parking requirements.”

October 2000 PDSP Amendment

When the County Board approved a major PDSP amendment for Shirlington on October 7, 2000, it added 2.4 acres of County-owned land within the Trades Center, increasing the overall site area and reallocating approved density and land uses. By increasing the daytime population of Shirlington and anchoring the neighborhood with the theater, library and plaza complex, Arlington hoped to revitalize the area.

Approved Uses and Development (with Oct. 2000 PDSP Amendment)

Parcel #	Site Area (Acres)	Office Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)	Retail Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)	Hotel Rooms	Residential Dwelling Units
1	2.67	81,410	12,000	299	-
2	8.43	304,216	190,211	-	-
3	10.22	195,000	75,560	150	400
4	5.13	-	-	-	-
5	0.78	-	4,400	-	-
Total	27.23	580,626	216,458	449	804

The 2000 PDSP amendment application requested four separate density exclusions:

- Parcel 3: 43,000 sq. ft. for the library and live theater;
- Parcel 3: 20,060 sq. ft. for the existing cinema;
- Parcel 2: 42,653 sq. ft. of basement storage space for retail on the south side of 28th Street South, now known as Campbell Avenue; and
- Parcel 3: 44,218 sq. ft. of restaurant uses.

The County Board approved three of the four proposed exclusions, declining to approve the one for existing restaurants. Condition #25 of the PDSP notes that any change in use for the spaces excluded from density calculations would require an amendment.

While researching the PDSP approval, the County verified that the approved exclusion for the library and theater was not counted in density tabulations shown in the Approved Uses and Development (with Oct. 2000 PDSP Amendment) table. Also factored into this table are the other two approved exclusions for the cinema and basement storage space.

A revised version of the table is provided below. Excluded density is not included in the table, but it is available in the footnotes.

Approved Uses and Development (with Oct. 2000 PDSP Amendment) – with Approved Exclusions Removed from Tabulations

Parcel #	Site Area (Acres)	Office Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)	Retail Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)	Hotel Rooms	Residential Dwelling Units
1	2.67	81,410	12,000	299	-
2	8.43	304,216	147,558	-	-
3	10.22	195,000	52,500	150	400
4	5.13	-	-	-	404
5	0.78	-	4,400	-	-
Total	27.23	580,626	216,458	449	804

Density exclusions:

- Parcel 1: 75,770 sq. ft. of studio space (approved through Jan. 11, 1997 PDSP amendment);
- Parcel 2: 42,653 sq. ft. of retail basement storage space;
- Parcel 3: 43,000 sq. ft. of library and live theater space;
- Parcel 3: 20,060 sq. ft. of cinema space.

As noted before, the County Board did not approve the requested density exclusion for the existing restaurants on 28th Street South/Campbell Avenue. Nevertheless, the project’s overall density was not reduced to account for this action. As a result of this, the density approved with the 2000 PDSP amendment is actually higher than the maximum density set forth in the “C-O-1.5” Zoning District.

The following table compares the allowable density under the Zoning Ordinance with the approved 2000 PDSP amendment. Converted to gross floor area, the difference between allowable density and what was approved is approximately 14,000 sq. ft. For illustration purposes, this table allocates uses so that the approved office/retail is above the density allowed by “C-O-1.5.”

2000 PDSP – Approved Densities by Use				
	Site Area	Office/Retail	Hotel	Residential
Approved 2000 PDSP Dev.* (not counting exclusions)	27.23 Acres	797,084 sq. ft.	449 rooms	804 dwelling units
Acreage Allocated to Each Use	27.23 Acres	11.98 acres 521,849 sq. ft.	4.08 acres	11.17 acres
Approved 2000 PDSP Density	-	1.53 FAR	110 Rooms Per Acre	72 Dwelling Units Per Acre
“C-O-1.5” Maximum Density	-	1.5 FAR	110 Rooms Per Acre	72 Dwelling Units Per Acre

*Development totals do not include the density exclusions and bonuses noted on the table on page 16, which do not count toward the maximum density calculations.

2001 – 2007 PDSP Amendments

As applicants submitted final site plans to implement the PDSP, the County Board approved multiple amendments through the most recent final site plan approval in 2007 (Hilton Garden Inn on Parcel 3). Included in these amendments were the modifications of land uses and allowing density bonuses.

Summary of PDSP Amendments Approved by County Board		
Date	Parcel #	Summary of County Board Action
8/6/01	1	Convert 4,485 sq. ft. retail to office
6/8/02	3	Increase excluded GFA for library/theater from 43,000 to 54,396 sq. ft.
9/13/03	3	Increase retail/grocery by 7,880 sq. ft. and exclude this amount
10/18/03	1	Convert 299 hotel rooms to 196 residential units plus 49 units for affordable housing bonus
9/16/06	3	Convert 8 hotel rooms to 4,752 sq. ft. retail

The following table depicts the resulting PDSP tabulations due to the changes in density:

Approved Uses and Development – with Approved Exclusions and Bonuses Removed from Tabulations					
Parcel #	Site Area (Acres)	Office Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)	Retail Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)	Hotel Rooms	Residential Dwelling Units
1	2.67	85,895	7,515	-	196
2	8.43	304,216	147,558	-	-
3	10.22	195,000	57,252	142	400
4	5.13	-	-	-	404
5	0.78	-	4,400	-	-
Total	27.23	585,111	216,725	142	1,000

Density exclusions and bonuses:

- Parcel 1: 75,770 sq. ft. of studio space and 49 dwelling units (bonus density);
- Parcel 2: 42,653 sq. ft. of retail basement storage space;
- Parcel 3: 54,396 sq. ft. of library and live theater space;
- Parcel 3: 20,060 sq. ft. of cinema space;
- Parcel 3: 7,880 sq. ft. of grocery store (bonus density).

The amendments following the 2000 PDSP approval continued to carry forward the discrepancy between allowable density under “C-O-1.5” and approved PDSP density, as shown in the table below. For illustration purposes, this table allocates uses so that the approved office/retail is above the density allowed by “C-O-1.5.”

Currently Approved Densities by Use				
	Site Area	Office/Retail	Hotel	Residential
Approved 2000 PDSP Dev. (as amended)*	27.23 Acres	801,836 sq. ft.	142 rooms	1,000 dwelling units
Acreage Allocated to Each Use	27.23 Acres	12.05 acres 524,898 sq. ft.	1.29 acres	13.89 acres
Approved 2000 PDSP Density	-	1.53 FAR	110 Rooms Per Acre	72 Dwelling Units Per Acre
“C-O-1.5” Maximum Density	-	1.5 FAR	110 Rooms Per Acre	72 Dwelling Units Per Acre

*The development totals do not include the density exclusions and bonuses noted under the first table on page 18, which do not count toward the maximum density calculations.

Density Conclusion

The 2000 PDSP amendment created a situation where the approved density exceeded the highest density allowed in the "C-O-1.5" zoning district after accounting for all approved exclusions and bonuses that were specifically referenced in the site plan ordinances and related staff reports, a situation that was carried forward through subsequent amendments. The amount of development above "C-O-1.5" is approximately 14,000 sq. ft. of office/retail, or the equivalent of 23 hotel rooms or 15 dwelling units. All of the sites within the PDSP have been subject to a final site plan and have been built according to the amended PDSP.

Due to the additional 14,000 sq. ft. being included in the site plan ordinance approved by the County Board, this amount of gross floor area is in effect an approved modification of use regulations, even if it is not specifically called out as such. Therefore, it should be treated as approved bonus density that is not tied to a specific use or location within the PDSP.

The 14,000 sq. ft. above "C-O-1.5" may be carried forward in future PDSP amendments, including any conversions to other uses allowed within "C-O-1.5". Any additional bonus density calculations would be based on the existing built density. Future amendments to the PDSP should specifically clear up any discrepancies and accurately account for all density allowed within the site, including modifications and exclusions.

Amenities and Outcomes

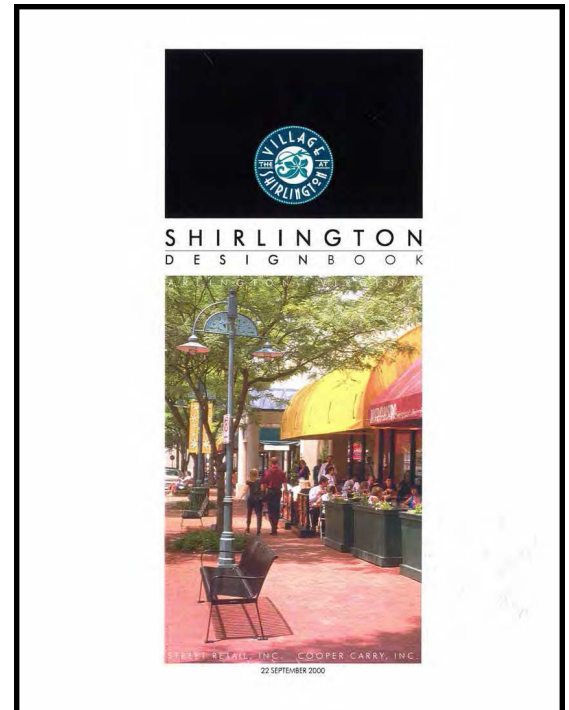
The 2000 PDSP recognized that density may be necessary for sustainable development, but that it would not be sufficient on its own. The following amenities and outcomes were both planned and implemented, underscoring the successfulness of the 2000 plan.

Design Guidelines

Released in 2000, *the Shirlington Design Book* contains the recommendations for public spaces and circulation on guided streetscape development. In conjunction with the 2000 PDSP, these guidelines were developed to create a streetscape that's walkable and inviting to pedestrians, and to give Shirlington its own unique sense of place.

Some of the streetscape amenities include graphics and signage, garbage receptacles, bicycle racks, landscaping, fountains, lighting, paving, public art, decorative planters, benches, seating and store façade design – all of which contribute to its sense of place and vibrant street life.

The *Design Book* emphasizes the importance of attention to streetscape amenities, noting that “this attention to detail helps make Shirlington such an enjoyable place.” However, “while the value of amenities such as trash receptacles may seem obvious at first glance, the scarcity of such items in the public realm is testimony to the fact that streetscape amenities are not always valued by developers and municipalities.” It also emphasizes both the pedestrian orientation of Shirlington’s center and on transitioning from surface parking to structured parking.



Shirlington Design Book (2000)

Donation of Public Land



Trades Center on left, Shirlington on right

One of the earliest examples of the County's participation in public-private partnership was its decision to supply land of its own to the development. Arlington contributed 2.4 acres of its Trade Center site, which houses the County's vehicle equipment repair and headquarters for all field operations.

This was the most important factor in extending the main street, making it possible for the theater, library and plaza complex to be completed, and forced Arlington to rethink how it planned for such non-urban uses in a jurisdiction that has become entirely urban.

Extension of the Main Street



Campbell Avenue in the summertime

In 2000, South 28th St. was renamed Campbell Avenue and extended from one block to two. By doubling the length of the main street, retail space and on-street parking were added, creating an exceptional pedestrian experience.

Campbell Avenue is anchored by the theater, library and plaza complex. The street's detailed design incorporates pedestrian-friendly elements that make Campbell Avenue a comfortable and exciting place for visitors and residents to walk.

During the day, Campbell Avenue is a friendly, relaxing street. Young professionals, families and retirees mix easily, shopping, dining or just enjoying an afternoon walk. In the evenings, theater-goers and young people fill the street, enjoying dinner or gathering with friends.



Sidewalk cafe along Campbell Avenue

Public Library

At the time the plan was created, the public library was isolated from the rest of Shirlington. Housed in an old building and lacking the technology of our more modern libraries, the decision was made to relocate the branch in order to create a civic presence on Campbell Avenue and generate additional foot traffic.

The relocated [Shirlington Branch Library](#) offers more than three times the space of Shirlington's previous location. The library contains over 50,000 books, CDs and DVDs, 100+ newspaper and magazine subscriptions, and dozens of computers for public use. Due to its physical connection with the Signature Theater, the Library houses the County's only dedicated theater collection and has partnered to host a variety of theater-related programs.



Shirlington Library previous location (1996)

Regional Theater

[Signature Theatre](#), a regional company with considerable renown, was originally located in an industrial area with few amenities and very little opportunity to gain additional economic activity from Signature's patrons. Bringing the theater to its current location was key to cementing its reputation as an arts and entertainment district and has enabled Signature to reach new and larger audiences.

Arlington provided the "land" as an additional floor above the public library and built the shell space for the theater under a long-term, low-interest lease arrangement. In addition, Signature built its own 48,000 sq. ft. space, which includes two black-box theaters and a large lobby.

The theater has grown to reach over 100,000 people annually, receiving praise from local and national press. In 2009, Signature received the 2009 Regional Theatre Tony Award in recognition of artistic excellence.



Signature Theater and connected Library

Public Plaza and Public Art



Water feature, titled Down Stream

The quarter-acre plaza was envisioned as a civic gathering space to provide an opportunity to terminate the street in a significant way with a public place, providing opportunities for events and social interaction. To enhance the plaza, the developer committed \$75,000 for public art in the form of a water feature and a light display.

The water feature, titled *Down Stream*, was designed by local artist Martha Jackson-Jarvis, and sits in front of the library building on the eastern boundary of the plaza. The two-part fountain culminates in a semi-circular pool, with rich color and aquatic shapes throughout the design.



LED light feature, titled Flow

The LED light feature, titled *Flow*, was designed by Erwin Redl. Four LED bands of varying height run up the side of the library and theater complex. The feature emphasizes the building's height and draws people down Campbell Avenue and into the plaza.

Bus Transfer Station



Shirlington Bus Transfer Station

Opened in 2008, the [Shirlington Bus Transfer station](#) is served by five regional bus routes and two local bus routes, providing numerous transit options for people coming in and out of Shirlington.

Even before the construction of the transfer station, Shirlington was one of the busiest bus hubs in Arlington, with 1,000 daily passenger boardings. Since the opening of the station, ridership has more than doubled to 2,000+ boardings per day.

The transfer station connects Shirlington to the regional transit system, including Metrorail at the Pentagon and Reagan National Airport, providing a wide variety of transportation options for residents and visitors.

Additional Public Parking

The 2000 PDSP called for a total of 4,539 parking spaces on site. In order to achieve this number while maintaining its walkable feel, Shirlington had to make the transition from surface parking to structured parking. This space total was achieved by a partnership with Arlington, which enabled the developer to use a portion of publicly-owned land adjacent to Shirlington for parking structures.

Negotiation and compromise on parking has been continuous throughout the implementation of the PDSP. There is a strong desire for offices, residents and retailers to have reserved parking, which sub-optimizes parking assets and discourages multi-use activity. These challenges would have been mitigated were the parking structures publicly-owned. However, in Shirlington, all of the parking structures remain privately-owned and managed according to site plan conditions. To alleviate these issues, the County has explored digital display systems that indicate available parking spaces in order to make the most of Shirlington's parking resources.

While Shirlington remains largely car-oriented with five structured parking garages, the emphasis is on shared parking so that visitors only have to park once in order to enjoy all of Shirlington's amenities.



Public parking structures

Grocery Store

Ever since the demolition of the Grand Union in the 1980s, Shirlington lacked a grocery store. By the mid-2000s, few grocery chains were willing to adapt their large, suburban stores to the smaller, two-story space that was available.

Through intense negotiations, the developer reached an agreement with Harris Teeter, a North Carolina-based grocery chain that already had smaller stores in operation. A 23,000 sq. ft. store was built on the lower floors of what is now the Delancey apartment building. The Harris Teeter has become critical to Shirlington's success as a residential center.



Harris Teeter grocery store

Implementation and Conclusions About Outcomes

Once the PDSP amendments were approved, redevelopment moved quickly. Between 2000 and 2010, the Shirlington PDSP was completely implemented. Fortunately, the plan was amended prior to a development boom, enabling Shirlington to take advantage of one of the region's hottest real estate periods. Had the plans not been in place, Shirlington would have missed a significant opportunity in the economic cycle to revitalize the area.

Shirlington has succeeded to the extent that surrounding developments are now using their proximity to the area as a selling point – one housing development calls itself “Shirlington West.” In 2010, Shirlington received the Donald E. Hunter Excellence in Economic Development Planning award from the American Planning Association.



Public vs. Private Investment



Total County Government Investment: \$30 million

Target: \$1 in public funds = \$24 private investment

Actual: \$1 in public funds = \$42 private investment

Source: Arlington Economic Development (AED)

Today, Shirlington is a thriving, mixed-use urban village in its own right, but at a different scale than smart-growth communities existing within rail transit corridors. The addition of housing units, a hotel and office space has helped ensure a wide variety of activity, supporting the local restaurants and retailers. The theater, library and plaza complex draw people from the surrounding areas, as do a number of events that take place on Campbell Avenue throughout the year.

Lessons Learned



Sidewalk cafe along Campbell Avenue

Shirlington's success provides lessons for other lower-density, car-oriented communities looking to apply smart growth principles and create an appropriate density in a mixed-use core.

Shirlington's history offers numerous lessons under the following three subsets:

- Planning
- Partnering
- Engaging

Planning

First iterations of plans are not always successful. First and foremost, Shirlington's redevelopment and ongoing success show the importance of continuing to work toward a plan that was unsuccessful in earlier iterations. The lesson is not merely to plan, but to plan, evaluate, adjust and repeat.

When Federal Realty and Arlington County began working on the redevelopment of the site in 2000, they worked within the framework established by the 1982 PDSP instead of starting from scratch. By amending and building on this original plan, the County was able to enhance the area's existing assets and create a clear vision for the site moving forward.

Patience in planning is a major lesson; the redevelopment process isn't something that can simply be accomplished overnight. Case in point: it took an entire generation to transform Shirlington from a decaying shopping center into the vibrant urban village it is today.

Success requires creativity, in addition to increased density. When it comes to density, creativity can sound scary in the abstract. The excluded density provided the civic space considered essential to Shirlington and illustrates the importance of a civic presence. The library, theater and plaza complex was key to being an anchor, drawing residents from surrounding neighborhoods.

Support a mix of uses sustainable in the local market. It took time to find a sustainable mix of land uses in Shirlington. The 1976 PDSP contained too much residential density, while the 1982 PDSP plan proposed a retail density that could not be supported given the residential capacity at the time. As a result, the site relied too heavily on the lunchtime office crowd and weekend visitors, triggering significant retail turnover. By reducing retail space, increasing office space and residential units, and adding a civic space, the area finally found a sustainable balance of land uses.

Other key planning lessons drawn from Shirlington's success:

- Build on existing plans, especially the elements of those plans that have been successful;
- Monitor and revise the plan within a consistent vision, one which provides as much certainty as possible to investors and residents;
- Provide a walkable environment, even if walking is not the primary mode of transportation to development;
- Be creative to get essential amenities such as a grocery store and library;
- Include civic space with public art in the plan;
- Even when the car still dominates travel, provide transit, biking and walking options;
- Depending on the economic environment, the local government will need to be a partner with the developer to varying degrees and in all cases the public needs to be engaged in the plan.

Partnering

Strong and innovative public-private partnerships facilitate development. Both Arlington County and Federal Realty were highly motivated to turn Shirlington into a community asset. As a result, they worked closely and collaboratively throughout the process to find creative solutions to any problems that arose. Both parties were willing to take risks and make concessions in order to facilitate the development process.

The partnership involved land swaps, creative financing and extensive collaboration among the County, developers and the community. The success was well-timed, with both Arlington and Federal Realty having funds they were willing to commit to the project in advance. Both parties were eager to redevelop the site quickly and efficiently, and willing to insist on elements they saw as essential to the site's ultimate success.

Tie investment to specific attributes and outcomes, giving investors some degree of certainty. In order to leverage private funds, Arlington worked to structure deals and incentivize development, in addition to making County funds available from the outset. The incentive plan devised by Arlington included a mix of uses and increased density of one type, and reduction in density of another. This plan encouraged rapid site development responsive to market conditions.

Arlington's investment in the partnership was made ahead of private investment, focused on building infrastructure necessary to support additional development, which was key to leveraging private funds. In addition, the County came up with detailed guidelines for streetscapes and buildings to give investors a clear idea of the end result.

While there were critical partnerships in the Shirlington redevelopment between the County, developer, Signature Theatre, Harris Teeter and many others, the most important partner was the community.



Theater, library and plaza complex

Engaging

Engaging residents is the key to creating successful, contextual plans that build on the community's assets. Shirlington illustrates the importance of both engaging the community and building on the community's existing assets – key components of smart growth.

Arlington has an extensive history of working with the community on new plans, something referred to as "the Arlington Way." County departments work with community members and groups before a proposal is brought to the Planning Commission, which makes recommendations on the proposal to the County Board. This process allows citizens to express concerns about proposed developments and the impacts they will have, as well as to provide input on what they think will make a project successful. Arlington has found that this not only helps build consensus around a project, but also helps to give the community a clear idea of what to expect when the project is completed.



Shirlington Bus Transfer Station on opening day



Shirlington retail along Campbell Avenue

The communities neighboring Shirlington provided input throughout the planning process at more than 50 meetings leading up to the adoption of the plan. In addition to the feedback from community members and representatives from civic, neighborhood, condominium and homeowners associations, a new advisory group was created, consisting of seven Board-appointed community representatives.

By engaging its constituents, the County was able to create a plan for the site that addressed community concerns, including increased density and traffic volumes, and built on the site's existing assets; elements that draw people to Shirlington and are valued by community members. The first Shirlington iteration had a movie theater which was retained as an art house movie theater. Moving Signature Theatre and the library to Shirlington built on this existing strength and helped cement the image of the area as an entertainment district.



Example of a Shirlington streetscape

Proactively address community concerns. Among the concerns raised from meetings with the community were the typical density fears about traffic. To address these concerns, the PDSP required that the developer install new traffic signals at key intersections and contribute \$200,000 to be used for traffic calming measures in surrounding neighborhoods.

In addition to this contribution, the developer was required to construct new medians and make other improvements to the streetscape, consistent with the *Shirlington Design Book*. These additions made the community feel better about the project, and ultimately strengthened the development as a whole.

Conclusion

Shirlington is a successful example of a vibrant, mixed-use core for a lower-density, car-oriented community. None of the parties involved would suggest that this was easy; there were frequent tensions and conflicts along the way.

Shirlington shows that decaying suburban retail centers can be transformed without the introduction of transit or fundamentally altering the character of surrounding neighborhoods. To do so requires engaging the people who live in these communities, finding a developer with a willingness to work with the community in a public process and a local government willing to partner with all of the parties involved.

