

# **Arlington County One of the First in the Nation to Adopt “Main Street” Form Based Code**

Columbia Pike Initiative Offers New Development Option, Streamlined Approvals

The Arlington County Board tonight approved the Columbia Pike Form Based Code at a County Board recessed meeting. This approval makes Arlington one of the few local jurisdictions to adopt this innovative approach to community design, one of the first in the nation to apply Form Based Code to revitalize existing, older sectors; and among the largest – if not the largest – application of Form Based Code in the country.

“With the adoption of the Form Based Code, we now have additional tools in place to assist the Columbia Pike area,” said Paul Ferguson, Chairman of the Arlington County Board. “We thank the citizen commissions, the civic associations, the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization, the citizens of Arlington and County staff for all their hard work and input that was incorporated into the final product. Special thanks go to Chris Zimmerman and also to Charles Monroe, for whom this was a key initiative as Board Chairman.”

## **Revitalizing South Arlington’s Historic “Main Street”**

The Columbia Pike Form Based Code is designed to create a pedestrian-oriented development that will make Columbia Pike a pleasant walking experience. The codes will foster a vital “Main Street” through a lively mix of shop fronts, sidewalk cafes, and other commercial uses at street level, overlooked by canopy shade trees and upper story residences and offices.

The design for Columbia Pike includes several new plazas and civic squares. The parking plan includes a focus on centralized, shared parking that will create a “park once; then walk” environment. Creating buildings that front the sidewalks will encourage people-friendly buildings that will be developed at a modest scale. Virtually all Columbia Pike buildings will have a maximum height of six stories, tapering down into the neighborhoods.

The Board also cleared the way for the first project under the Form Based Code. The 'Capstone Project' will be the first mixed-use development project in the Columbia Pike corridor in more than 40 years. The project will feature live/work townhouse units -- ideally suited for small business owners -- retail, and residential space and could be underway sometime this year.

The Columbia Pike corridor is a three and one-half mile area stretching from the Pentagon to the Fairfax County line near Baileys Crossroads. The Arlington County Board approved the Columbia Pike Initiative -- A Revitalization Plan on March 12, 2002. Subsequently, the Columbia Pike Urban Design Charrette and citizen workshops provided extensive input into the development of the Columbia Pike Form Based Code. The Columbia Pike plan also focuses on economic development, transportation, housing, historic preservation, parks and recreation.

## **Columbia Pike Form Based Code**

### **Background**

“It’s time we develop new and more flexible (zoning) codes that can serve all citizens far more effectively than their 20th century predecessors.”

-- Paul Farmer, Executive Director, American Planning Association, 2003

In February, 2003, the Arlington County Board approved the Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District Form Based Code, becoming one of the first local jurisdictions in the nation to embrace this innovative approach to community design.

### **What Is A 'Form Based Code'?**

Traditional zoning originally sprang up as a necessity to separate different uses – to protect residential areas from industrial plants, for example. Today, zoning fosters the creation of big box stores, subdivisions, industrial parks and massive parking lots. The net result is big distances between different use buildings and dependence on cars.

Instead of focusing on what is undesirable, Form Based Codes focus on the community's design vision. Basic rules specify a range of acceptable building types and welcome mixed-use development. Modest regulations specify minimum and maximum height, avoiding big expanses of walls and requiring building out to the sidewalk to create a sense of place.

### **“Main Street”: Back to the Future on Columbia Pike**

The Columbia Pike Form Based Code is designed to revitalize South Arlington's historic Main Street, creating a pedestrian-oriented development that will make Columbia Pike a pleasant walking experience. The codes will foster a vital “Main Street” through a lively mix of shop fronts, sidewalk cafes, and other commercial uses at street level, overlooked by canopy shade trees and upper story residences and offices.

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### **Community Input**

The Columbia Pike Initiative – A Revitalization Plan was adopted by the County Board on March 12, 2002 to establish a vision and development framework to guide public and private investment in the physical revitalization of the area. Subsequent citizen workshops – during the Columbia Pike Urban Design Charrette process – were held in September 2002 and extensive community input continued as the Form Based Code was developed.