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## **Community Progress Network and Northern Virginia Health Foundation's LINK Project**

### **Exploring Community Needs in Arlington Report of Findings**

#### **Community Meeting**

October 17, 2019

Wakefield High School Cafeteria

1325 S. Dinwiddie St. Arlington VA 22206

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## COMMUNITY MEETING OVERVIEW

The Community Progress Network (CPN) is a coalition of Arlingtonians committed to advancing our community's vision of inclusivity and diversity. Comprised of more than 30 non-profit, government and civic leaders, CPN works to engage, educate and advocate for equitable programs, policies, and investments in Arlington. Recognizing that the voices of low-income Arlingtonians often go unheard, CPN launched a series of facilitated roundtable discussions focused on key service areas essential to every individual and family. The CPN Roundtables provide an opportunity for community residents to share challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening services and supports. The fourth roundtable took place on October 17, 2019 at Wakefield High School in Arlington and focused on food, transportation, and housing.

This fourth roundtable focused on exploring community needs in Arlington, in collaboration with the Linking Social Factors to Health in Arlington County (LINK) project – a grant-funded data-collection initiative to identify the social/structural determinants affecting the health of Arlington's neediest residents in its most disadvantaged neighborhoods and help key County government and nonprofit stakeholders prioritize action to address and direct resources toward these problems. Funded by Northern Virginia Health Foundation and assisted by George Mason University's Center for Health Policy Research and Ethics, the LINK project includes the following clinical partners:

- Arlington Free Clinic (AFC) - provides comprehensive free healthcare to low-income, uninsured Arlington County adults through the generosity of donor and volunteers.
- Arlington County Department of Human Services' Public Health Division (DHS) - operates a Maternity Clinic that provides pregnancy testing and prenatal services to the county's low-income, uninsured women.
- Virginia Hospital Center's Arlington Pediatric Center (APC) - offers outpatient medical care to Arlington County's medically underserved children, ages 0 to 18, whose family income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- Virginia Hospital Center's Outpatient Center (OC) - supports the healthcare needs of Arlington County's adult residents who are uninsured or underinsured, and provides advanced diagnostic treatment services, such as imaging, surgeries, and chemotherapy.

Removing barriers to participation and creating a welcoming environment for the 69 participants was a key priority for the roundtable. Volunteers included translators to support the full participation of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, Mongolian, and English speakers. Childcare was provided. 14 small group tables were organized by language spoken, with a conversation facilitator, notetaker, and, as needed, interpreter. One table was designated for teens aged 13-18. Individuals at or below 30% of area median income were recruited from within CPN and LINK partner organizations.

The evening kicked off with a family style dinner allowing participants and table volunteers to get acquainted and build trust to encourage more open conversation. After introductions, facilitators led participants at each table in a discussion about their access to food, and what barriers, if any, exist to them obtaining the type of food they desire for their families. A second round of discussion explored challenges around housing, and how the participants handled those challenges. The third round focused on the participants' transportation needs, and ideas on how to address challenges that arose during the



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conversations. Each round of table discussion was followed by a full room “harvest” time to uncover emerging common concerns and cross cutting issues.

Notetakers at each table recorded closely the comments and concerns of participants. CPN will publish the full report as well as all table notes on its website, [www.communityprogressnetwork.org](http://www.communityprogressnetwork.org).

The attached is a report organized into a narrative section and a coded section of the comments gathered that evening. The narrative section covers highlights of the discussions based on the topic questions. The coded section codes statements based on the themes of the discussion.

## DATA ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The process used by the LINK collaborative to analyze the Arlington County community meeting notes in the areas of food, housing and transportation are described below.

### Multi-Organizational Team of Analysts

The LINK collaborative used a team approach for data analysis to bring together a group of individuals with a range of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives on topics covered in the community meeting. A team of six individuals from the Arlington Free Clinic, Arlington Department of Human Services and George Mason University reviewed the community meeting notes and identified key challenges experienced by community residents and potential solutions to address those challenges. Two analysts were assigned to a topic (food, housing, transportation) and reviewed 17 sets of notes from the meeting, representing one set of notes for each table at the community meeting. After reviewing and coding the notes, analysts compiled a list of codes (as shown in Appendix I), then identified key challenges and potential solutions, presented on pages 5 – 9.

### Identification of Codes and Themes

The data analytic process included the identification of codes and themes. Codes are descriptive or conceptual labels assigned to excerpts of raw data. Raw data in this project was in the form of text from the table notes, in which notetakers summarized statements from community residents or captured verbatim quotes. The analytic team started with global codes “Challenges” and “Solutions,” then identified sub codes under these global codes. Top themes, which are codes that were observed frequently or have practical significance, were identified for each topic (food, housing, transportation) that represents the most critical challenges experienced by community residents. An example of codes for challenges might be “Limited Frequency of Buses during Weekends and Holidays” and “Limited Availability of Fresh Produce.”<sup>1</sup>

Potential solutions for addressing the challenges were generated during the community meeting; however, were not comprehensively explored due to limited time. Instead of themes representing ideas frequently mentioned by community residents, what resulted was a compiled list of solutions raised by individuals. The data analytic team identified potential solutions that were thought to be feasible actions that could be taken by Arlington County government, local non-profit organizations or businesses. For example, one participant at the event used the term “Rideshare” and others discussed a free or reduced priced shared shuttle service when describing solutions to transportation challenges to medical appointments and grocery shopping.

### Report of Findings

The remainder of the report is focused on highlighting critical challenges experienced by Arlington County residents in accessing and maintaining adequate food, housing and transportation. The top challenges expressed by community residents are described in this report, however additional concerns were raised that may need to be explored in future community meetings. The report also provides a list of three or four solutions in each area that need to be discussed among LINK collaborative partners, as well as community leaders in government and other local organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I for complete list of data codes.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### I. FINDINGS – FOOD

#### What types of food do you like to serve your family? What gets in the way of you and/or your family having enough food?

**Cost of food.** Affordability was a common barrier and many residents expressed that in most cases, accessing ‘affordable’ food options comes with an expensive price tag. One resident shared that, *“Trader Joe’s and other stores, while they appear ‘affordable,’ they are marketing towards people with money. ‘Affordable’ for the middle class is not affordable for people who are low-income, living paycheck-to-paycheck, scraping by.”* Several residents shared strategies that work well for them to access to affordable food options. Residents shared that shopping lists help with staying on budget. Residents also shared that Aldi food is a little cheaper than other stores and Food Star is better for culturally appropriate food options. Another resident mentioned that they shop in bulk at Costco because it is cheaper and they take a bus there and a ride share (e.g., Uber or Lyft) home to help with getting enough food.

**Use of government and safety-net services.** Even with public assistance (e.g., SNAP or WIC), there was concern that the allocated benefits do not sufficiently address the financial hardships with buying quality food as well as culturally appropriate foods. One resident mentioned, *“I work at Giant and I can’t afford it. I buy the ‘yellow tag’ foods that are expiring. I receive SNAP, but how can I survive on \$190 per month? (3 meals x 30 days = \$2.11 per meal).”* Residents stated that resources like AFAC and food pantries were helpful. However, challenges with using these services included: receiving foods that were close to expiration or expired or not in alignment with dietary restrictions or cultural preferences.

**Difficulty getting to and transporting food.** Furthermore, residents expressed that limited access to affordable stores in their communities, exacerbate barriers to obtaining enough food. The distance to affordable stores with quality foods is so far for some residents, they must use public transportation. *“The grocery store is far, so I have to take the bus. It’s another cost and it’s not easy to carry grocery bags on the bus. It takes me 2 hours to get groceries, which isn’t good for perishable foods.”* The added cost and physical burdens to carry grocery bags on public transportation make it difficult to obtain enough food. Although efforts have been underway throughout the county to increase access to quality foods, residents expressed the stores that replace what were once affordable options in their neighborhoods are too expensive. For instance, even though Harris Teeter replaced Food Star on Columbia Pike, some residents don’t believe they have taken steps to make it friendly for low-income residents, such as marking WIC/SNAP food items.

**Tradeoffs of inadequate access to food.** Despite these barriers, many residents still make the necessary adjustments to ensure they have enough food. However, these decisions often come with compromising food quality, and even at times cultural beliefs. Residents shared that since culturally appropriate foods are typically more expensive, families are forced to buy unhealthy alternatives to ensure they have enough food. Families also shop at multiple locations to access variety of foods that will last a long period of time. Additionally, residents mentioned the convenience of unhealthy fast-food options in their communities makes it easier to access these foods instead of quality food options. Incentives such as discounts at fast-food restaurants and no cooking, makes it easier to have these options.

## What creative ways, resources, and/or information have you used to solve food affordability?

**Improve options for transporting groceries.** A suggestion for addressing the transportation barriers related to accessing affordable foods, include improving options for transporting groceries (e.g., AFAC offering a shuttle services after getting groceries; MegaMart offering free rides for shoppers that spend over a certain amount of money). Residents also mentioned that Medicaid offers paid transportation services for grocery shopping twice a month. Despite limited proximity to affordable stores, residents believe there are many community resources that offer food donations (e.g., churches, Salvation Army, AFAC). *“I find that the quantity of food AFAC gives is a lot for one person, so I go every other week. I have a neighbor who I share food with. AFAC is a good program, it is a great help. We can get most of what we need at the local food bank on Nelson Street. If not, then we go to Aldi. Arlington has lots of resources: AFAC is a great place to obtain food.”*

**Improve labeling of foods.** To troubleshoot challenges with the affordability of food, one suggestion made was to improve the labeling of foods covered by public assistance programs in the stores. Residents also recommended sharing information on expiration dates (use-by vs sell-by) at AFAC, so clients can be confident food is safe to eat.

**Improve information about accessing food and services for homeless adults, children, and undocumented immigrants.** One resident shared *“There are a lot of homeless people who live on the streets and sleep there every night. We’re even seeing kids in similar positions. The qualifications for food stamps and other services should be provided for them regardless of how many hours they work or if they lack necessary information.”* Another resident shared *“There are a lot of people without documentation who can’t get help through services.”* Residents shared that some stores, like Safeway have apps to help find food discounts. However, since everyone doesn’t have access to this technology, the people who need the discounts most might not have access. Hence, residents believe the stores should find alternative ways to market this information.

## II. FINDINGS – HOUSING

### What gets in the way of you and/or your family having adequate housing in Arlington?

**Pursuing affordable housing.** For many residents, challenges in pursuing affordable housing in Arlington include a lack of awareness about local resources for housing options and application requirements. Eligibility criteria that prohibit having a criminal record, undocumented immigrant status, and lack of credit were common barriers shared with completing the application process. One participant disclosed the ASPAN shelter referral requirements can make it difficult to obtain timely housing which consequently resulted in this individual living on the street and living in multiple shelters until a referral is accepted. Similarly, some residents described an application process that involves long waiting periods, which make it difficult for them to obtain affordable housing in a timely manner.

**Housing instability.** Residents mentioned housing instability as another barrier. Numerous residents were concerned with the financial strain brought on by annual raises in rent, which was a key factor in frequent moving and housing displacement. Undocumented immigrant status and fluctuating income



were other financial challenges attributed to housing instability. Difficulties with affording utilities was another common barrier that caused housing instability.

**Benefit Loss with Economic Mobility.** Once residents obtain housing assistance benefits, maintaining affordable housing comes with tradeoffs to economic mobility that allows residents to build wealth. One participant disclosed, *“if I take a job that increases my income, I lose my other benefits.”* Another mentioned, *“in order to continue receiving housing assistance and other financial benefits, I’m forced to turn down promotions and raises. I feel like the system is setting me up to remain stuck in low wage jobs with no upward mobility. How am I supposed to build a savings and advance in this situation?”*

**Difficulty affording utilities.** High costs of utilities and hidden costs were also noted as a barrier to adequate housing. One resident shared, *“Most people pay utilities separately from rent. I have to prioritize my bills. I alternate payments. I pay 1 utility this month, another next month, because I can’t pay them all in 1 month. I sometimes get disconnect notices.”* One participant shared, *“We do pay all utilities – water, gas, sewer, gas stove, electricity. When it gets to be unbearable, I turn on the gas stove up to 400 degrees and crack a window.”* Families without a washer/dryer in their units must pay out-of-pocket for laundromat services, and inadequate heat/central air consequently results in using utilities to address these shortfalls.

**Other barriers to adequate housing.** Other concerns that participants mentioned as barriers to adequate housing are safety (apartment complexes and shelters), cleanliness of apartment complexes, noisy neighbors, and limited parking options for residents. Participants also expressed a need for affordable housing in the Columbia Pike area and a need for larger affordable units (3 to 4 bedrooms).

**What is it about your personal network, other people, or agencies/organizations in Arlington that helps you and your family to find housing/rent solutions?**

**Improve guidance for pursuing affordable housing.** To help troubleshoot challenges with pursuing adequate housing, residents recommended providing additional guidance about the different housing programs and services as well as how to apply to the appropriate one.

**Sustain opportunities to promote community engagement.** Residents also suggested to offer community engagement opportunities (e.g., CPN community meetings) for new residents to learn more about local resources. One resident shared, *“We just moved to Arlington two years ago and don’t know too much about resources. That’s why we came here, to learn more.”*

**Expand locations for affordable housing.** Moreover, residents recommended that there should be more variety in the neighborhoods where affordable housing is available so that they are not just located in low-income areas. Improving access to affordable housing in areas with schools that have resources for culturally diverse communities was shared during the discussion. One resident said, *“...about 12% of the student population at Hoffman Boston are Mongolians. We would like our children to continue to study at Hoffman Boston community where we have access to books in Mongolian at Hoffman Boston library and have Mongolian speaking resource person at Hoffman Boston.”* For many residents, safety and convenience of local community resources helps with maintaining adequate housing in the county. One resident shared, *“safety of Arlington neighborhoods is a big draw and inspires residents to stay despite relatively high rent.”*



**Explore subsidy options for utilities.** Additionally, to help with the high cost of utilities, residents thought federal assistance or state/local subsidies could help offset the costs of utilities in housing units.

**Increase access to financial education resources to improve housing affordability and self-sufficiency.**

Another recommendation included offering financial education sessions to help build savings. One resident shared, *“The shelters should help people set up a bank account, so people can start something. And set up the account so your case worker is a co-sign so you can’t withdraw money without someone else signing off. It’ll keep you from spending your money. People need education about how to manage money. I do “direct deposit” to save \$75 a week: I give it to my case worker who puts it in a safe and keep \$5 for the bus. When you get enough money in the safe you can open up a bank account – they do this at RPC [Residential Program Center].”*

**Improve safety of affordable housing.** Residents recommended installing security cameras in housing units for safety, create more space so neighbors aren’t living so close to each other, and build an outdoor recreational space (e.g., playground) near housing units. Residents suggested no smoking signs as well as a suggestion box in housing units so residents can discretely share their concerns with management without fear of losing their housing.

**Sustain county resources for rent relief.** One resident mentioned the county services for rent relief was very helpful for her family. The participant mentioned, *“As someone who is undocumented it is very hard. I’m here for my kids because they are American and want to stay in the US. Rent relief is very limited. One time my husband had a problem sending money from Egypt. The County helped to pay my rent until my husband could send it. This service is available once a year”*. Participants mentioned that although housing for younger residents can be difficult, housing services for seniors works well.

### III. FINDINGS – TRANSPORTATION

**What, if any challenges have you experienced in obtaining and/or accessing affordable, accessible, safe, and adequate transportation to go to work, shopping, visiting a doctor, etc.?**

**Access to Public Transportation.** Several residents shared that while the public transportation services are great in Arlington (extensive and accessible), the transfers can make it difficult to get around in a timely manner and routes are lacking in neighboring jurisdictions. Getting to places like Woodbridge, Annandale, etc. are very difficult and time consuming. Public transportation works well to go to the grocery store or other community services that distribute food. However, it can be difficult to catch public transportation home after completing grocery shopping. One resident mentioned, *“When you catch the bus to AFAC and you have to get it home, it’s difficult. Thank god I have a brother (UBER driver) who will give me a ride.”* Moreover, residents shared difficulties with using public transportation in inclement weather especially at bus stops that do not have a shelter. Residents also shared that bus stops are too far to get to by walking.

**Cost of Transportation.** Although cars can be more convenient, expensive gas prices and car maintenance are common barriers. Several residents that have a car mentioned that they still use public transportation depending on where they need to go. Many residents agreed that public transportation, both the metro and bus, is expensive and getting assistance to resolve these issues is even more difficult. The prices for using these services make it difficult to go to multiple places in one trip. One

resident shared, “Sometimes I won’t go to the doctor, school, grocery because I don’t have the money to get there.” Furthermore, it was shared that since public transportation can be time consuming (e.g., long wait times) these can pose challenges with maintaining doctors’ appointments.

**Communication Involving Public Transportation Services.** For many residents, challenges with transportation services arise with accessing information about transportation options. Without internet access/ smartphones, many residents are left in the unknown about travel vouchers/discounts, and public transportation schedules. Other barriers include a perceived need for improved customer service. Residents shared experiences about how bus drivers are insensitive to their circumstances. For example, a resident admitted getting into an argument with the driver because they didn’t want her to bring the baby stroller on the bus. Another resident shared, “One time, I had \$20 on my card, and I went to take the bus, and then I ran out of money. I asked the bus driver what to do, and he said it wasn’t his problem. I said I did everything right, but it took my \$20. I had to get off the bus and find another way home.” Additionally, adequate support to obtain transportation to and from medical appointments is another challenge. Residents described challenges in completing paperwork for payment of transportation to medical appointments.

**Safety Concerns with Transportation.** Residents conveyed safety concerns about bus stops that do not have shelters, isolated from businesses/commercial retail, and do not have adequate lighting. Other safety concerns were shared about walkability, where residents mentioned pedestrian stops are not very visible and cars tend to not stop or slow down.

**Before we wrap this portion of the conversation—we want to just go around the table—and see if you have any thoughts about things that COULD help you or other members of the community to solve transportation challenges and or barriers to access them?**

**Expand public transportation services.** Recommendations to improve public transportation access include offering a shuttle system from major affordable grocers. Increasing bus services to reduce long wait times lengthy walks. “One resident noted, “The bus could be better if you added a stop between Rhodes and Queen Street, because that uphill and downhill walk is a lot.” Residents also suggested to improve weekend bus service to accommodate many residents who work on the weekends. Another recommendation was to improve access to the 4-week metro pass. Since the digital divide can be a barrier for many residents, offering an alternative to online purchasing with a credit card will improve access to this resource.

**Improve customer service.** Residents expressed the importance of improving customer service to overcome challenges with inadequate access to public transportation. One resident mentioned, “I would like for bus drivers to show more respect to elderly and mothers with children when getting on the bus.”

**Sustain resources to alleviate costs and promote convenience.** Other solutions residents found helpful to improve affordability include bus tokens provided by the Arlington Department of Human Services and vouchers for red top cabs. Residents believe the bus is economical with transit pass, otherwise it’s expensive. Last, subsidies for seniors, students, and disabled residents work well to alleviate transportation barriers. Several participants use the ART Bus and Metrobus. It is very convenient for those who live on Glebe Rd and Columbia Pike neighborhoods. People will opt for ridesharing services when they need to be somewhere on time and factor in the cost of these services in their budget.



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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I – DATA CODES

### I. FOOD CODES

#### CHALLENGES

##### Difficulty in transporting food – transportation overlap

- “The grocery store is far, so I have to take the bus. It’s another cost and it’s not easy to carry grocery bags on the bus. It takes me 2 hours to get groceries, which isn’t good for perishable foods”
- “Even though I am in a homeless shelter that offers food, many low-income people are in a “food desert” where they are 2 miles or more away from a grocery store. This is a challenge”
- “So basically, you have transportation. You don’t have to bus it. My fiancé passed away in May. We used to ride the bus. He was 60 years old with cancer. It was very difficult to go on the bus. Getting the items home was very hard. It was winter time.”

##### USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: – transportation overlap

- “I depend on public transportation and I can carry only little at a time. It takes time to go to grocery store and makes little challenging to have more than few day supply of food items. I take the bus from our neighborhood to the food bank and back on Nelson Street. But there is only one bus for us to use so we must plan. The grocery store is far, so I have to take the bus. It’s another cost and it’s not easy to carry grocery bags on the bus. It takes me 2 hours to get groceries, which isn’t good for perishable foods.”

##### WALKING: – transportation overlap

- “But then I get the rest at Giant on Columbia Pike. So, I freeze a lot of meat in my freezer. But neither of these are in walking distance or really in my neighborhood. I can walk about a mile to the Penrose Giant. I walk about 3 blocks and then ride the bus for 5-10 minutes to the store and back. Food shopping can be challenging without a car – 2 of 4 participants did not have a car and walked to food store. . Some stores are being closed or are far from home, walking distance.”

##### GOING OUTSIDE OF ARLINGTON: -- cost of food – transportation overlap

- “Sometimes you have to travel out of Arlington to get the best prices. Maybe Alexandria or somewhere else. Transportation is a challenge. I used to travel all over, but that’s why I go to Aldi now.”
- Public transportation can be difficult to use if there are not enough variation in timing. As it takes more time, this affects the condition of perishable food items, such as meats and milk. As some of the grocery stores are not within walking distance and not all items can be found at one store, using public transportation various times for one purpose is an added cost.

##### Cost of food

- “Affordable stores are closing. Safeway in Bailey’s closed, Shoppers in Seven Corners closed, and Food Star on Columbia Pike closed and was replaced with Harris Teeter, which is very expensive.”
- “I work at Giant and I can’t afford it. I buy the “yellow tag” foods that are expiring, that’s me, I’m the “yellow tag guy.” I receive SNAP, but how can I survive on \$190 per month? (3 meals x 30 days = \$2.11 per meal)”

- “My family gets SNAP. We get our food from Costco and Restaurant Depot. We buy in bulk because it’s cheaper. We don’t go to Giant because it’s too expensive. I take the bus to the stores and take an Uber back. We want to buy halal meat but it’s too expensive. The Halal Stores do take SNAP but it’s still very expensive.”
- Money – hard to afford all the food you want, especially if it is fresh (meat, veggies). No, cannot get everything (though we do get some of it) because food stamps only give \$15 a month and not all the food banks and stores (Queen of Peace, Food Star, AFAC) carry mixed products so she must travel between them. Fresh fruit and vegetable are expensive.
- “[Giant’s] meat is very expensive and it is hard to use food stamps there. Safeway is not affordable. I can sometimes buy a treat at Giant, like recently I got a steak and mushrooms on sale, but it is hard to shop affordably. Red meat in this and it is little bit expensive here. Wegman’s is good quality and healthy, but too far away and too expensive. Produce is expensive. If I got to a MegaMart, my money won’t go very far. This food is expensive” (participants select shopping options based on cost [over] access to transportation/time commitment).

**Summary:** Cost of food in Arlington in general is expensive. Using SNAP many residents can buy what they want but not all location will have everything they will need. On the flip side, many residents do not receive enough through SNAP or WIC to buy food. In most cases, fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive, as well as other produce items. This expense in fresh food ties into the preference of accessing junk or fast food.

**Location of less expensive grocery store:**

- “Affordable stores are closing. Safeway in Bailey’s closed, Shoppers in Seven Corners closed, Food Star on Columbia Pike closed and was replaced with Harris Teeter, which is very expensive”
- “Harris Teeter is the nearest grocery store, but it is more expensive than Giant and other stores. Sometimes Items have to be taken away at the check-out counter. This is embarrassing. Harris Teeter is within walking distance from where I live (in supported housing), but I have found that they do not always identify food eligible for WIC. In Giant, the WIC food is easy to identify”.
- One person goes all the way to Trader Joe’s in Old Town, on occasion. Another person commented that Trader Joe’s and other stores, while they appear “affordable,” they are marketing towards people with money. “Affordable” for the middle class is not affordable for people who are low-income, living paycheck-to-paycheck, scraping by.
- “Affordable stores are closing. Safeway in Bailey’s closed, Shoppers in Seven Corners closed, Food Star on Columbia Pike closed and was replaced with Harris Teeter, which is very expensive. I work at Giant and I can’t afford it. If I go to Aldi, I can do much better. Sometimes \$20, or \$14. Mega-mart looks cheap but it's expensive”.
  - Food Star is especially missed, not just for affordable prices, but for providing Latino ingredients and foods.
  - Some people travel all the way to Food Star on W. Glebe Rd in Alexandria, but that’s a long bus ride.
  - A few people who live in the Buckingham neighborhood shop at the Latin Market on N Glebe & Pershing.

**Summary:** Residents mention the lack of affordable grocery stores are a barrier to buying proper food. To be able to access affordable food, they must go to various stores. Even though Harris Teeter replaced Food Star, they haven’t taken steps to make it friendly for low-income residents (even though they are in a low-income neighborhood), such as marking WIC/SNAP food items.

### Use of state or federal benefits such as AFAC, SNAP:

- **SNAP USE:** “SNAP gets renewed every 6 months and I have to show income every single time. Dealing with the SNAP employees is easy. Only one time they were rude and insisted on speaking with my daughter”. Time – “SNAP benefits mean you get the produce quickly so you can’t cook it fast enough”. WIC/SNAP: “Not all the same stores have the same products under the same benefits, for example not all milk is WIC milk, only certain brands, and they might vary by store”. No, can’t get (or keep everything) because SNAP benefits come and she needs to use them right away, so she picks up lots of fresh food but then it expires since she can’t eat it fast enough. SNAP applications are challenging.
- **MORE CHOICES AT AFAC:** AFAC gives out food, but families are often given items they do not use. More choice would be nice. “I receive food from AFAC (comes once a week to my housing complex), but there are challenges in getting the right food for my son. Sometimes AFAC has fruit, but not always; AFAC often has 1% milk, but my son has to have whole milk until he is older. The good things from AFAC are the milk, eggs and desserts”. AFAC is still important because for many families it’s their only food supply. AFAC is easier to sign-up for than SNAP.
- **EXPIRATION DATES:** “The only thing I don’t like about the food pantry is expiration dates. I feel that some of the stuff is so outdated. Looks molded. 10% of the food. I head to produce and things in packaging – it looks molded. Is it still fresh enough to eat? I need more information on those items. Say your milk has expired. Is it still good? Some of the food that is given away at AFAC, we are not sure about the expiration date on it – is it still safe to consume it? We are a little hesitate to consume it. What’s the window between the expired date and it still being edible? Also, it’s hard to find expiration dates on AFAC food and sometimes the food is expired. The fruit and bread are often rotten”.

**Summary:** Many residents that use SNAP mention they do not receive enough to go through the month. Its process in general is a hassle, as they have to share they income every 6 months, have a short window to use the benefits – fresh food expires before it can be used, and not all stores have the same items under the same benefit. In terms of using AFAC, it is an easier process but there isn’t as many choices, and there is a shared concern about the expiration dates of the food items.

### Adequate space for storage:

- “I get my food from AFAC and I have big family, so I must have extra freezer to store my food.
- “My kitchen is small – my stove is up against the wall so if I cook then the grease and oil gets on the wall so I can’t use two of my burners. I have plenty of food storage.”
- “In your house, do you have enough space to store and prepare food? - 3 – No”
- “But I have friends that have 4 people in their household, and for them it’s a challenge. They don’t have enough space.”

### Affordability of ethnic/culturally specific food:

- “We as Mongolian eat lots of red meat and it is little bit expensive here.”
- “We mostly eat Ethiopian meals, but gluten free injera [an Ethiopian staple and base for all Ethiopian food] is very expensive and the more Americanized version is not healthy, loaded with carbohydrates, and hard to digest. Because its cheaper, people buy it more often.”
- “Muslims don’t get the meat from AFAC because it’s not halal.”

### Shopping strategies



- “If I shop, I tend to buy things not on our grocery list.”
- “You need to know how to shop there so that your purchase can be affordable – I buy whatever is on sale. I can’t shop willy-nilly.”
- “I do the food bank once a week, Salvation Army once a month. I have canned goods to last me at least 3 months.”
- “There’s a variety of supermarkets, but the problem is there’s a variety of prices and quality among them. You can’t go to 3 or 4 supermarkets to do your shopping.”

**Easy access to fast or junk food:**

- “I get discount point from McDonald and use that to get burgers for my children.”
- “If you decide to eat junk food, is there any reason why? - Easier to get it like that – you don’t have to make something.”
- “It’s easier to get greasy food”
- Several participants said they preferred to buy and eat organic foods, health foods, fruits, vegetables salads, etc., but that those items were too expensive to buy often. “Junk food” is much cheaper, but would rather not eat it.

**Limitations of choices for nutrition or due to medical conditions:**

- “I have to eat gluten-free, but that type of food is very expensive and it not available everywhere.”
- “I recently found out I am pre-diabetic, so I need to make diet modifications.”
- “I have stomach issues. I just want to generally know. I don’t eat anything out of date.”
- “I try to have a balanced diet. Protein. I very rarely run out of food.
- “It would be nice to hear ‘hey this expired on the 10th but you can eat it all the way up to the 15<sup>th</sup>.”
- “I agree with her, sometimes it’s hard to get nutrition. You’re always watching, we’ll eat whatever is available.”
- “When you’re hungry you’ll eat what is available, it’s hard to get nutritious food.”
- “Me with my daughter, we have some dietary restrictions. We don’t eat a lot of pasta, she gets a lot of acid in her stomach. She needed medical treatment.”
- “I’m getting older and I want healthier food, but I can’t afford it.”
- “I must eat gluten-free, but that type of food is very expensive and it not available everywhere.”

**SOLUTIONS****Transportation in relation to food:**

- “Medicaid will pay for driving to and from a grocery store 2 times a month. A lot of people don’t know this.”
- “I was at the hospital and I didn’t have a way home, but they had a 24-hour van to get you home. You showed your ID band and could get a ride. When you are at the hospital in Arlington, they let you out of the ER at 2:00AM in the morning with no car fare and no way to get you there.”
- “If AFAC had a little pickup after getting your groceries, that would help. Especially for people with kids.”
- “If there was easier transportation to transport groceries it would be better.”
- MegaMart offers free rides for shoppers that spend over \$70.



**Cost of food:**

- “I love Harris Teeter. I love the one on Glebe Rod. I love Harris Teeter prices. Trader Joes by Clarendon? It’s expensive though”. “Not everything is.”

**Location of less expensive grocery store:**

- “Harris Teeter is not marking which products are covered by WIC. Other stores do this. Also, WIC items are not grouped, so it is hard to find the products. Harris Teeter can do better labeling.”

**WHAT WORKS WELL****Transportation in relation to food:**

- “Sometimes I take the bus there and then take Uber or Lyft home with groceries. Especially if I shop at a place like Costco with bulk items. Can’t take those on the bus.”
- “I am blessed in that I have access to a car, so I can drive to the WalMart in Woodbridge for cheaper food. We need more affordable grocery stores in Arlington.”
- “I shop at the store at Glebe and Pershing and I can get a lot for my SNAP benefits there, especially meat and sometimes fruits and vegetables.”

**Cost of food:**

- “Everyone excited about Aldi opening in Bailey’s.”
- Some stores, like Safeway, have apps where you can find discounts.
  - This is good if you have a smart phone, but not everyone has that. So, the people who need the discounts most might not have access.
- “The ASPAN shelter has a chef from Peru; the food is really good. At the Fairfax shelter, I get 3 meals a day.” (Would also happen in A-SPAN, according to him).
- “Husband shops for household, usually Giant or Food Star in Alexandria. Giant is closer. Kids are used to American food which drives them to Giant. Food Star is better for Latin food which is preferred by parents.”
- Aldi food is a little cheaper than Food Star or Giant. Meat is a key component of food for Latinos.
- Giant or Aldi with Aldi being the better value, used to go to Food Star due to freshness and Latino selection. Cost is the biggest driver for store selection.
- The best store is at Pershing and Glebe.

**Use of state or federal benefits such as AFAC, SNAP:**

- “SNAP is easy to use, and I can use it everywhere. I get specialty items that aren’t provided at AFAC. But it can only be used for groceries, so prepared foods, like a rotisserie chicken, isn’t covered. SNAP is a good option but isn’t for everyone.”
- All participants at the table attend AFAC food distributions, most on a weekly basis. “I live paycheck to paycheck and can barely afford my food. At AFAC the food is free. AFAC provides staples, but I can’t take the milk since I’m lactose intolerant. Instead, I buy lactose-free milk using SNAP at the grocery store. AFAC is easier to apply for than SNAP, less paperwork and bureaucracy.” AFAC volunteer: they do a good job vetting donations, eggs, vegetables, all good. We go about every week for milk, eggs. To AFAC, things we use every day.
- “I find that the quantity of food AFAC gives is a lot for one person, so I go every other week. I have a neighbor who I share food with. AFAC is a good program, it is a great help. We can get most of what

we need at the local food bank on Nelson Street. If not, then we go to Aldi.” Arlington has lots of resources: AFAC is a great place to obtain food.

### Shopping strategies

- Shopping list helps.
- “Salvation Army gives food once a month. It is great. Glebe road by the fire station. You get the necessities – seasoning, flour, cooking oil. I have no issues because I’m picking up exactly what I need.”
- “I am truly blessed. If it wasn’t for AFAC and Salvation Army...”
- “There are a lot of churches that do monthly food distributions, it’s a question of knowing where to go and what they will have to get help. That’s a great benefit to living in Arlington, there are so many resources available.”

## II. HOUSING CODES

### CHALLENGES

#### Affordability of Housing

- “I’m on the housing grant and have been on it for 10 years. I was fortunate at first, no rent going up for 8 years. Now I found another lovely place to live, a refurbished apartments but they are raising the rent every year. So now I’m facing having to move.”
- “I can’t keep getting these letters saying I have to move. If you want to move me, find me a place, move my furniture, I’m disabled I’m retired I can’t do it. Who is going to pay for the move, pack my stuff?”

#### Need for affordable housing in Columbia Pike area

##### Housing instability due to:

- Annual rent raises cause displacement
- Shelter referral requirements
  - “I am in the shelter currently. I was waiting on a referral to ASPAN, you can’t just walk in. I was living on the street trying to find a place to go. A guy told me to go to Anacostia and I have never seen a worse place in my life – I was at St. Elizabeth’s in DC. And that was stressful. It is hard to get your bearings in the shelters when you’re not native to the area and know where to go. I was going between St Elizabeth and ASPAN every day waiting to get my referral, waiting in the parks during the day.”

##### Pursuing affordable housing – difficulties due to:

- Unaware of how to apply/local resources available
- Understanding affordable housing options
  - “I have a hard time understanding the difference between low-income housing (section 8) and affordable housing.”
- Long waiting period
  - “And section 8 takes years to pursue. So, it is better to do permanent supportive housing but there are a lot of people trying to do this.”
  - It is hard to go from a shelter to long term housing without waiting a long time.

- Criminal record
  - “My criminal record made it difficult to pursue affordable housing options. Places don’t give you a second chance.”
- Resident doesn’t meet eligibility requirements (e.g. for fuel assistance)
- Difficult for younger residents to find affordable housing compared to seniors
- Not having a legal status in the U.S
- Lack of credit (a co-signer is needed to sign a lease)
- Housing application charges are expensive

**Maintaining affordable housing** – financial challenges due to:

- Undocumented immigrant status
- Income instability

**Need for affordable larger units** (3 or 4 bedrooms)

- “We have six people in a two-bedroom house. When the kids get older it will be an issue but for now it is okay. Three kids, my father, and us. Arlington is small. There are not that many options.”

**Difficulty affording utilities**

- “We do pay all utilities – water, gas, sewer, gas stove, electricity. When it gets to be unbearable, I turn on the gas stove up to 400 degrees and crack a window.”
- “Most people pay utilities separately from rent. I must prioritize my bills. I alternate payments. I pay 1 utility this month, another next month, because I can’t pay them all in 1 month. I sometimes get disconnect notices.”

**Hidden cost of inadequate access to utilities** (e.g., washer/dryer) in affordable units**Economic mobility threatens housing stability**

- Fear of earning more, then losing government support
- “If I take a job that increases my income, I lose my other benefits.”
- “In order to continue receiving housing assistance and other financial benefits, I’m forced to turn down promotions and raises. I make \$10/hour at Giant. I was offered a promotion for \$14/hour, but I had to turn it down or my housing benefits would drop significantly. I feel like the system is setting me up to remain stuck in low wage jobs with no upward mobility. How am I supposed to build a savings and advance in this situation?”

**Concern about safety around apartments/complexes****Safety concerns in shelters**

- “The shelters can be unsafe. There is drug use and mental health issues.”

**Other concerns:** Cleanliness of apartments/complexes, noisy neighbors, and additional costs for parking. Solutions

**Provide additional guidance on the section 8 paperwork and how to apply for affordable housing. Incentivize CAFs with 3+ bedrooms and utilities included in rent.**

**Install security cameras in housing units for safety.**

- “I live in Section 8 housing and I live alone. Sometimes I come home to find things missing. I use a deadbolt lock at night, but it doesn’t lock when I leave the house. I don’t feel safe. I would like a security camera.”
- “Shouldn’t we have security cameras? I’d like to feel a little bit safer after hours. My fiancé got attacked. Someone busts him upside his head. If we had cameras that would solve that problem.”

**Include affordable housing in various neighborhoods, not just areas with low income.****Need more space so neighbors aren’t living so close to each other****Build outdoor space for a playground/area near housing units.****Install Suggestion Boxes in Housing Units**

- “We made a suggestion box, so people could say it without management knowing. We are not going to speak up for fear of losing our housing.”

**Post no smoking signs**

- “I see a lot of people smoking when I take my kids out to the bus. It’s not good for my kids to see. It would be nice if there were “No Smoking” signs near school bus stops.”

**Community engagement to learn more about local resources for new residents**

- “We just moved to Arlington two years ago and don’t know too much about resources. That’s why we came here, to learn more.”

**Federal assistance should subsidize costs for lack of utilities**

- “The only major problem is the washer/dryer. It is very expensive to wash clothes at the laundromat. Because I have kids, I might spend up to \$100/month just on washing clothes. SNAP doesn’t cover laundry detergent. Also, if I had a washer/dryer in the unit it would be much cheaper. I think SNAP should cover laundry detergent.”

**Offer financial education**

- “The shelters should help people set up a bank account, so people can start something. And set up the account so your case worker is a co-sign so you can’t withdraw money without someone else signing off. It’ll keep you from spending your money. People need education about how to manage money. I do “direct deposit” to save \$75 a week: I give it to my case worker who puts it in a safe and keep \$5 for the bus. When you get enough money in the safe you can open up a bank account – they do this at RPC.”

**Provide guidance to help residents pursue affordable housing**

- “We need guidance on the section 8 paperwork and how to apply for affordable housing. Housing should be more affordable, build more housing and make the buildings bigger so they have more units.”
- “Make it easier to learn about what programs you’re eligible for”.

**Use AFAC to help with food access**

- “All my SSI goes towards rent. I have no money for anything else. So, I go to AFAC.”

## WHAT WORKS WELL

### Many residents reported that their housing situation was safe and affordable.

- “safety of Arlington neighborhoods is a big draw and inspires residents to stay despite relatively high rent.”

### Housing services for seniors works well

- “Housing is much easier for seniors 65+. I qualify for more programs. I just moved into Columbia Hills and have a brand-new apartment with new appliances, furnishings, etc. It’s clean and safe.
- “Arlington takes care of its seniors.”

### Affordable housing is conveniently located to community resources (e.g., stores, public transportation, schools)

- “I like living in Arlington Mill [APAH] because it’s close to a shopping center, CVS, the bus, and more. Even if I don’t drive, I can reach everything I need.”

### Housing meets needs

- Safety, responsiveness from apartment management, etc.

### County service for rent relief

- “As someone who is undocumented it is very hard. I’m here for my kids because they are American and want to stay in the US. Rent relief is very limited. One time my husband had a problem sending money from Egypt. The County helped to pay my rent until my husband could send it. This service is available once a year.”

## Access to Information about Transportation Options

## CHALLENGES

- The APP is not available to people who can’t afford smart phones.
- What other programs does Arlington have for transportation? (opportunity for more information)
- You have to qualify for that, to get to doctor’s appointments.

## SOLUTIONS

- “I’ve spent a lot of time waiting for buses, but yes checking on your phone can help the bus app is great. Now I know exactly when my bus is arriving so I don’t have to wait around for a bus that’s never coming. It’s made a big difference.”
- “I use the internet at the library to research metro/bus routes.”
- “The maps/schedules are clear when I go to a bus station.”
- “I usually look at the schedule and map on my phone, so that I don’t have to spend a lot of time waiting.”

### III. TRANSPORTATION CODES

#### Transportation Access to Work and Other Services

##### *Single Occupancy Vehicle*

##### CHALLENGES

- “Gas is still expensive, and I talked about this at the last meeting.”
- “I have a car. It broke down for like 3 months, so I used public transit and used SmarTrip cards.”
- “I had a car that I had paid off, but I missed an insurance payment and the coverage lapsed. The police took away my car. It’s frustrating, but I don’t mind not having a car. I use the bus and walk now. I’m healthier because I walk so much. But it was much more convenient to have a car when visiting family outside of Arlington. Now, to get to Woodbridge, I have to take the train to Springfield and my family has to drive to pick me up from the train station.”

##### SOLUTIONS

- “Gas isn’t very expensive because everywhere I drive to is very close by, so I make the choice to drive.”
- Some people carpool with extended family and friends.
- One participant uses a very old car for local travel – benefits from having handicap sticker. Drives daughter places – mother and daughter live in same apartment complex
- Car transport for construction worker who needs to carry tools
- “I was given a car by a family member. I’ll go to Trader Joes with a friend and I’ll drive and they may buy some things for me. Bartering is an idea for transportation for those of us that have cars. We can share rides for goods/groceries.”

##### *Public Transportation/Demand Response*

##### CHALLENGES

- Metro hard to use (teenager table)
- “I do not have a car, so I use public transportation or Uber to get to work.”
- Bus is convenient Monday – Friday, however recommendation for increase in weekend bus service frequency to encourage weekend use.
- Bus service not good on weekends, takes too long, not reliable, schedule is not the same
- “I use a car or bus for shopping, usually bus based on proximity.”
- It is Easy to reach grocery store through public transportation.
- “Mostly on the weekends it takes too long to get where I need to go, because there’s only a bus every 30 minutes. If you miss it, you’re waiting half an hour.”
- “When you catch the bus to AFAC and you have to get it home, it’s difficult. Thank god I have a brother (UBER driver) who will give me a ride.”
- Monthly pass is hard to get.
- Especially on weekend it is long wait time.
- It takes a long time to get from point A to point B-- especially when there are transfers and even worse when you have to travel with kids.

- “It’s challenging to go to the grocery store using the bus. With all the groceries you have to take and the issues that come with child pick-up or delays, it’s not worth it to take the bus or metro.”
- “I take the bus (to grocery stores) because I don’t have a US license. If there was easier transportation to transport groceries it would be better.”
- “We need an affordable way to go too far places like Costco or Aldi to do grocery shopping because buying bulk items are hard to transport. The bus system takes a lot of time.”
- “Sometimes buses run 30 minutes apart. The hardest places to go to is Home Depot and Costco. Because I try to buy in bulk because it’s cheaper but it’s hard to use public transport for bulk items.”
- All take bus, lots of peoples at bus stops, high school students said bus is less crowded as some kids drive or ride bike (teenagers asked how they get to school)
- Bus routes are extensive and accessible. Everyone complimented this.
- Several participants mentioned that while the service is great in Arlington, it’s not very good and routes are lacking in neighboring jurisdictions. Getting places like Woodbridge, Annandale, etc. are very difficult and time consuming.
- Bus is crowded; some people are unruly (this comment relates to APS school buses)
- Metro – can use it but too crowded or can only use it with mom (teenager table)
- “Sometimes I take the bus there (grocery shopping) and then take Uber or Lyft home with groceries. Especially if I shop at a place like Costco with bulk items. Can’t take those on the bus.”
- “It’s difficult taking the bus home from the grocery store or bulk stores (Costco). I usually bus there and Lyft or Uber home.”

## SOLUTIONS

- “The bus could be better if you added a stop between Rhodes and Queen Street, because that uphill and downhill walk is a lot.”
- Several participants use the ART Bus and Metrobus. It is very convenient for those who live on Glebe Rd and Columbia Pike neighborhoods.
- “We love the ART buses, they just take time sometimes.”
- A shuttle system from major affordable grocers would be helpful, at least once a month, similar to Medicaid transportation.
- More buses more frequently with more stops. Bus stops are far apart and it’s hard to walk.
- “For me, the bus is accessible because I live near Columbia Pike. I take the 23b, 23d, 41, any of those will get me where I’m going. I usually only need to wait 10 minutes during the week.”
- Vouchers for red top cabs would be useful.
- Use Lyft – several do this (don’t have a car so if going somewhere far, use Lyft or Uber) – teenager table
- “I ride the bus – the 42, 77, and 45 get me all around. All I do is on Columbia Pike or Glebe Road so I go all where I need to know. I use the bus tracker app and watch the bus come, then go out and get it.”
- Bus transport ART + Metro bus, works well for needs



- People will opt for ridesharing services when they need to be somewhere on time (job, interview, appointment) rather than the bus that takes longer, but they don't make taking the time with the bus when they have the time).
- "I take the bus to the stores and take an Uber back."
- One client moved to Annandale for cheaper housing, but found transportation became a barrier. He doesn't drive and couldn't commute to work. Now he lives in Arlington with roommates and can afford to take Arlington buses. He can now commute easily and affordably.

## WEATHER CHALLENGES

- "I've had to wait in the rain for a bus, without a shelter. It's hard."
- "In my experience, traveling by bus in winter is hard. Sometimes I walk to Columbia Pike to get the bus, but in the winter, I need to take 2 buses – one from my house to Columbia pike, a second to my destination. So, the cold makes it hard."
- It is hard using the bus in extreme weather. Sometimes it takes more than 15 minutes for the bus to arrive.
- "It's hard to use this kind of transportation during bad weather. If I miss the last bus, I won't know how to get home."
- No shelter at school bus stop if it is raining or snowing

## SAFETY CHALLENGES

- "I usually don't take the bus, but my wife does, and I know it's a problem that there are areas without shelter."
- "It depends where you are. There are some stops that have a small shelter, but the lights are on, and there are businesses around. Other places have no light, no one around."
- In bus stations, there's people smoking or homeless people, sometimes young, they just need the public bathrooms.

## SOLUTIONS

- "I feel safe being on the bus."
- "I rely on friends and raiteros\* to take me places. I rather pay a raitero, someone I have known for years, instead of getting in a stranger's car [Uber/Lyft]."
  - One woman says she's scared of the train (Metro).

## *Cost of Transportation (common theme across tables)*

## CHALLENGES

- "If I get charged more than \$2 for using the bus within a 2-hour period, I don't have time to call and complain or fix it."
- "Also, sometimes I have to pay the fare twice -- \$2 for each bus. Before, you used to be able to travel for 2 hours on a single fare."

- “No, I put money on my card and took a trip and was charged each way.”
- “One time, I had \$20 on my card, and I went to take the bus, and then I ran out of money. I asked the bus driver what to do, and he said it wasn’t his problem. I said I did everything right, but it took my \$20. I had to get off the bus and find another way home.”
- “They told me to call about it, and my son called, and they didn’t help. One time it happened to me for \$20, one time for \$5. You put money on the card, but when you go to use it, the balance doesn’t show up on the account. The station attendant said – that’s the machine, not me, you need to call Metro.”
- “It is little expensive for me.”
- “It costs a lot to use the bus every day.”
- “Buses are affordable but metro is not. Sometimes I won’t go to the doctor, school, grocery because I don’t have the money to get there.”
- SmartTrip is expensive, but it’s a cost of living. Most participants say they factor it into their budget as a necessity, a priority. “If I can’t get to work, I can’t get paid.”
- The train is more expensive than the bus.

## SOLUTIONS

- Sequoia – Housing near Sequoia. “They make sure to give you tokens, if I don’t have any money, they give you tokens and the bus schedule. They will help you with that. The bus can be expensive, so sometimes I use a carpool option.”
- Find a way to make cost-effective monthly Metro passes available within Arlington. Bus is economical with transit pass, otherwise it’s expensive.
- “There are several places to load your card. You need to be sure to get a receipt.”
- “I would like to have transfer between ART/metro bus. I take three buses to go to work. I oftentimes, check the most affordable way between uber/lyft and public transportation.”
- “I am aware that there are subsidies for seniors, students, and disabled.”
- “You can go to the Shirlington office to get student discount card.”
- “I’m talking about the machines in the metro station.”
- “The metro is expensive, but the bus is cheap. But sometimes you need to use metro.”
- “Before, for \$2 you could travel for 2 hours. That’s enough to go somewhere, do your shopping and come back. But now, they will charge you for each trip.” (back and forth about whether this is accurate)
- Teenager table - all said they didn’t think Lyft or Uber is expensive
- “The bus is affordable, it is a nice program. Especially the two-hour transfer program. But before it was 3 hours, and now it is 2. So, it’s a little harder, you have to watch your time more.”
- “You get more rides if you buy a weekly bus pass at CVS, it saves \$5 if you do that.”
- “I’m a single guy. I live with roommates now so I can afford the space and location. I had moved out of Arlington temporarily (to Annandale) for cheaper housing, but then I paid more for transportation that was difficult to navigate and was further from work. I moved back to Arlington. I love Arlington. But I have to live with roommates to afford it.”

- Bus routes are extensive and thorough, you can get everywhere. Most take the bus more than the train.
- Others use rideshare apps (Lyft, Uber), especially younger adults. For most trips, it's affordable, no more than \$5 to get around town. That's not much more than the bus. Lyft is usually cheaper than Uber.

### ***Customer Service on the Bus (multiple tables)***

#### **CHALLENGES**

- "Sometimes I have to argue with the bus driver because they don't want me to bring the baby stroller on the bus."
- "Drivers should be able to at least not just drive off when seeing someone right by the door."
- "Bus drivers tend to be very rude and do not wait for passengers to sit."
- Recently changed from 3 hour to 2-hour window, so less opportunity to transfer buses within that timeframe.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- "We would like to see more frequent buses during the weekends/holidays." The current wait is too long (15-20 min during non-rush hours).
- "I would like for the bus drivers to show more respect to elderly and mothers with children when getting on the bus."
- "The drivers are kind, I have not experienced any bad ones, and can't say that about Metrobus."
- Bus service is excellent; there's been a lot of progress over the years.

#### **Medical Transportation**

- Medical transportation can be difficult to access
- "If you go in an ambulance in the middle of the night, they let you out and you can't get home. Hospital says they have taxi vouchers when you get into the ambulance but when it's time to leave they say they ran out. They tell you to go to Sequoia to fill out transportation documentation (it is a lot to fill out) I'm in the system, why can't you see what I qualify for."
- "To go to the doctor that's only 1 mile away, I need to plan to go about one hour before. The buses are too far apart. Wait time between buses is long." This poses a challenge, especially to doctor appointments.
- "My doctor and eye doctor sends me transportation if I let them know 3-4 days in advance since I have Medicaid Premier, even to appointments out of the County."

#### **First Mile/Last mile**

#### **CHALLENGES**

- Sometimes the destination can be far from the bus stop (3/4 mile).

- “I am homeless, so I must carry everything I have with me (30 pounds), and walking far distances makes it harder.”
- “I have to take the bus down to Glebe to pay my rent. And the driver misses our stop sometimes, and the next stop is far down the hill – and it’s a long walk, especially with my knees.”
- Some of the pedestrian stops are not very visual and cars tend to not stop or slow down.
- “I can walk about a mile to the Penrose Giant.” (comment from food discussion)
- Never taken a bike safety class; might take it if it is offered; scary to ride bikes on bigger roads (teenager table)

## SOLUTIONS

- Safe at cross walks (teenager table)
- Would use a bike more if there were more bike paths (teenager table)
- All wear helmets when they ride bikes (teenager table)
- “I walk to the library for internet access, which is really helpful.”
- Several people said they walk a lot for everyday activities because it keeps them healthier and it’s free!

## APPENDIX II – MEETING GUIDE

### I. OVERVIEW

The Community Progress Network (CPN) is a coalition of Arlingtonians committed to our community's vision of inclusivity and diversity. The coalition is focused on educating our community and advocating for equitable programs, policies, and investments in Arlington.

CPN will facilitate a series of CPN Roundtables focused on key service areas that are essential elements for every individual and family in Arlington. The CPN Roundtables will provide an opportunity for community residents with diverse backgrounds and experiences to share challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening services and supports across the County.

These series of round tables have several objectives:

- To empower participants to emerge feeling valued and heard
- To help participants expand their input and find additional information and pathways for participation
- To identify areas of opportunity for CPN and other leaders in our community to continue to engage on a deeper level to make positive change

This fourth roundtable will focus on exploring community needs in Arlington, in collaboration with the LINK project and its four partners. Linking Social Factors to Health in Arlington County (LINK) project is a data-collection initiative to identify the social/structural determinants affecting the health of Arlington's neediest residents in its most disadvantaged neighborhoods and help key stakeholders prioritize action. The four clinic partners of LINK project are:

- **Arlington Free Clinic (AFC)** provides comprehensive free healthcare to low-income, uninsured Arlington County adults through the generosity of donor and volunteers.
- **Arlington County Department of Human Services' Public Health Division (DHS)** also operates a Maternity Clinic that provides pregnancy testing and prenatal services to the county's low-income, uninsured women.
- **Virginia Hospital Center's Arlington Pediatric Center (APC)** offers outpatient medical care to Arlington County's medically underserved children, ages 0 to 18, whose family income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- **Virginia Hospital Center's Outpatient Center (OC)** supports the healthcare needs of Arlington County's adult residents who are uninsured or underinsured, and requires advanced diagnostic treatment services, such as imaging, surgeries, and chemotherapy.

Following a brief introduction and presentation, participants will be invited to share challenges regarding access to adequate and affordable services such as food, housing and transportation in Arlington; as well as resources and supports that are helpful for individuals and families.

Children ages 4-12 will also enjoy a healthy dinner; and then, participate in child focused activities. Note: Children under 3 will stay with their parents; and teens are encouraged to join a 'teen discussion about "Exploring Community Needs in Arlington."

## Roles and Responsibilities:

**Master of Ceremonies:** Nancy White, President of Arlington Free Clinic

**Master Facilitator: (Bryna and Jose)** Each Roundtable event will have 1-2 Master Facilitators who will introduce the agenda, guide logistics, facilitate discussion transitions, and offer support for table facilitators and notetakers.

**Table Facilitator:** Each small group table will have a designated facilitator who will moderate an interactive conversation (See Script and Facilitator TIPS in the Appendix)

**Notetakers/Recorders:** There will be at least one notetaker/recorder assigned to each small group table. This individual will record what you hear during the discussion in real time on a computer (or on paper and transfer to word document following the roundtable). The notetaker will also capture any follow up or action items that surface during the conversation. The notetaker will also provide a summary set of notes for the 'reporter' just before the 'harvesting discussion'. NOTE: Within one week following the roundtable, all notes should be cleaned up and emailed along to Jessica Stuart [jstuart@apah.org](mailto:jstuart@apah.org)

**Observers:** There will be a group of subject matter experts invited to be Observers during the event. The Observer role is to walk the room and visit as many tables as they want. The Observers will have the opportunity to listen throughout the conversation and ask prompt questions according to the small group discussion.

**Logistics Liaisons:** Logistics liaisons will provide onsite support, which includes room set up, on-site registration, childcare, translation services, and other identified needs. Note: Designated liaisons will bring necessary materials, agendas, name tags, sign-in sheets, discussion guides and any other materials/supplies needed.

**Space:** The space will accommodate several stages of activity: (1) Community Dinner; (2) Small Group Roundtable Conversations (set for 8-10 people each); and (3) Children's activity area. There will also be a sign in table at the front of the entrance.

**Participants:** Each roundtable forum will have 50-160 participants and will include people with a broad range of experiences and backgrounds. Participants will be seated in tables of 7-8 participants joined by a Facilitator and a Notetaker.

Table Assignments for Facilitators and Notetakers will be finalized one week prior to the event. Recognizing that participant registration will be ongoing up to the day of the event, we may have last minute changes in attendance and appreciate your flexibility if table groupings shift.

## II. KEY DATES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND PROGRAM COORDINATION

### Advanced Preparation

- Ongoing: Individualized follow-up with recruiting partners to build enthusiasm/turnout
- Sept 30: Finalize Facilitator Guide and Facilitator training content
- Oct 7: Logistics Volunteers Orientation
- Oct 10: Finalize printing of all materials and reconfirm ALL services and support
- Oct 15: Facilitator Webinar for Facilitators and Notetakers

### Recruitment/Outreach

- Invitations
- Trusted Source Outreach /Recruitment
- Identifying Language /Translation Needs
- Identifying Childcare needs
- Identifying Transportation needs

### Registration /Check In

- Participants Registration Table
  - Roster
  - Name Tags
  - Pens
  - Markers
- Volunteer Registration Table
  - Roster
  - Name Tags
  - Pens
  - Markers
  - Volunteers Assignments
- Observers Registration Table
  - Name Tags
  - Pens
  - Markers
- Child Care
  - Child Care Check IN
  - Dinner /Drinks
  - Dessert scheduled for later in evening as another activity
  - Age Appropriate Activities -with schedule
  - Consider Movie, Story Time, Crafts, Games, Puzzles, Sing a long, magician,



## Roundtable

- Roundtable Participants (adults, teens, children 2 years and younger)
- Round Tables of 8-10 people
- 4/6 Flip Charts around the room
- Agenda/Discussion guide at each seat
- Microphone x 2 /3
- AV-Projector/Screen-PPT/Video
- Table Facilitators
- Facilitator/Notetaker assigned at each table
- Observers seated at their table for dinner only
- Language Translators assigned
- DHS and other Resource Tables

## Dinner

- Dinner-served family style
- Staging Area for Dinner, dessert, drinks
- Plates, cutlery, napkins at each table place
- Volunteers Assigned

## Day-of Run of Show

- 3:30 pm** All logistics volunteers arrive to begin room set-up.
- 4:00 pm** Dinner arrives, and set-up begins.
- 4:30 pm** All table Facilitators, harvest recorders and Notetakers arrive for a walk through and get settled in.
- 4:45 pm** All volunteers and staff positioned to welcome participants as they arrive.
- 5:00 pm** Participants check-in, receive nametag with table assignment
- 5:30 pm** Dinner Served Family Style at Tables: Dinner conversation (everyone at the table can share a little bit about themselves)
- Please introduce yourself, and share where you live; something about your family (maybe how many children you have?); what brought you here tonight; what brought

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*Facilitator Tip: Go around the table and make sure each person has a chance to introduce themselves. If participation is low choose one or two of the prompt questions to continue the conversation*

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you to Arlington? What are your favorite things about living here in Arlington?

**Facilitator Prompt Questions:**

- Do you and/or your family have problems with housing, food, transportation, or something else?
- What is it about your (housing, food, transportation, other) situation that is most troubling or stressful? (expect some to name one, others will name another, but we want the table to talk about each in turn)
- How often do they occur? (every week, month, at the end of the month only, on weekends, short-term/long-term; specific times of the year)
- Are these problems related in any way? (e.g., are they connected, do they occur separately?)

**6:00 pm****Welcome and Introductions**

Nancy White will welcome everyone and introduce the topic for the roundtable discussion: Exploring Community Needs in Arlington. She will begin with recognizing the LINK Project task force members, elected officials, and county leadership in the room.

- We are so pleased that you are here this evening—for a very important conversation about “Exploring Community Needs in Arlington”
- There has been an active working group focused on what we call the LINK Project to identify how we can work together as a community to improve challenges and inequalities for low-income Arlingtonians.
- I want to take a brief minute to recognize our elected officials who are in the room. As well as special recognition to Patricia N. Mathews, President and CEO of the Northern Virginia Health Foundation and Tricia Rodgers, Program Officer.
- Erik Gutshall, Arlington County Board
- Christian Dorsey, Arlington County Board Chair
- Anita Friedman, DHS Director
- Dr. Reuben Varghese, Director of Public Health

Nancy White will provide a brief overview of the Community Progress Network and recognize CPN leaders in the room. Nancy then introduce Bryna Helfer as the Master Facilitator.

**6:10 pm****Overview of the Evening’s Format and Logistics**

**Bryna Helfer:** I am pleased to have the chance to be with you this evening. Tonight’s session is really to address a few key areas that we feel are important for decision-makers to hear from you about any challenges or barriers accessing affordable food, housing, and transportation.

Before we get started, we also want to lay out a few ground rules:

- Everyone’s perspectives and views matter
- We are not here to build consensus—but to have a conversation with each other
- As facilitators, we are here to guide the conversation; and keep us moving

- Our role is also to make sure that everyone has a chance to be part of the conversation
- And so, we ask that everyone ‘shares’ talk time, and is sensitive that others may also have something to say
- We recognize that not everyone will agree with everyone—so we ask that we are all respectful of each other -and listen as others talk
- We also have several topics that we want to get through –during our time together, and so, we will also serve as timekeepers, recognizing that we could spend hours and days on any one of these topics. So, ask that you move with us
- Can everyone live with these ground rules? (show of hands). THANK YOU!

*Transition (Bryna): Announce first round of roundtable discussion. Each table has a facilitator---Can you all raise your hands? Each table also has a notetaker---just checking to make sure everyone has a notetaker? We are here to LISTEN—and LEARN.*

*Let’s get the conversation started at your tables. The First topic will focus on food! What food you eat? How you get your food? The cost of food? I will check in with you in about 15 minutes.*

6:20 pm

**Guided Table Conversations 1.1: What types of food do you like to serve your family? What gets in the way of you and/or your family having enough food?**

**Facilitator:** Thank you again for being here tonight. To get us started—can each of you introduce yourself? Maybe share where you shop for food?

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**Facilitator Tip:** *For all Table Guided Conversations, offer everyone at the table to share their thoughts—until everyone has had a chance to share something that has been helpful. In prompt question with need/want those can be asked as two questions.*

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**Facilitator Prompt Questions:**

- Are you able to buy the food you need/want for your family? Have you made sure that you will have enough food for the entire month?
- Do you think the food stores in your area are affordable enough to buy food? Are you able to get the food you need/want there?
- How do you get yourself and the groceries from the store to your home?
- Do you feel you have adequate space you need at home to safely store, prepare, and cook your food?
- In what ways do these challenges/barriers affect you and/or your family’s life?
- How often do these challenges occur? (every week, month, at the end of the month only, on weekends, short-term/long-term; specific times of the year)
- Are these barriers related in any way? (e.g., are they connected, do they occur separately?)
- If you have not experienced any challenges with or accessing affordable food, why do you think this may be a need experienced by other residents?

**6:35 pm** Guided Table Conversations 1.2: **What creative ways, resources, and/or information have you used to solve food affordability?**

**Facilitator Prompt Questions:**

- What ideas do you have about improving the ability to get the food you need, buying the food you want, or preparing the food you have?
- Do you think we do enough as a county to provide affordable food access?
- For those of you that do not have challenges/barriers with food, what things do you do to meet this need? What community resources do you find helpful?

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***Facilitator Tip:** If someone is dominating the conversation—or intent about talking in depth about ONE thing move the conversation by acknowledging to the person that “What you are saying is important—but also want to make sure that everyone has a chance to share their thoughts and/or Can I ask that the notetakers—make a note—for someone to follow up on that topic specifically? — RETURN to the discussion using your prompt questions.*

**6:50 pm** HARVEST 1 (Large Group): **Gather challenges and potential solutions from all tables and discuss in the larger group. Bryna will facilitate a large group discussion that highlights some of the KEY THEMES and SHARED Conversations participants are having across the room.**

*Transition (Bryna): Announce second round of guided table discussion.*

*The next topic is HOUSING. Now this is a BIG topic—and we could spend the entire evening talking about housing—but we want to get to the specific challenges that you might be experiencing. I will turn it back to your table facilitators and then we will come back together again as a large group!*

**7:05 pm** Guided Table Conversations 2.1: **What gets in the way of you and/or your family having adequate housing in Arlington?**

**Facilitator Prompt Questions:**

- How is the space in and around your house working for you and your family? How does your current housing meet your family needs? What, if any needs are not being met? How safe and secure do you feel in your neighborhood? And around you home?
- Are you able to afford the type of housing you need/want?
- Are you able to find the type of housing you need/want?
- Are you able to get the help you need when there is a problem with your housing?
- Do you have the space, furniture and privacy you need at home to live comfortably?
- Do you feel safe where you live?

- Have you ever had difficulties with any of your utilities (water, gas, electric, etc.)? Has it ever been a challenge to pay for these services?
- Have you ever experienced any issues with: bug infestation, mold, lead paint, inadequate heat, water leaks, non-working stove, etc.?
- How often do these barriers occur? (every week, month, at the end of the month only, on weekends, short-term/long-term; specific times of the year)
- Are these barriers related in any way? (e.g., are they connected, do they occur separately?)
- We heard from many of you that XXX was a problem. Can you explain how this issue affects you and your family?
- If you have not experienced any challenges with affordable adequate housing, why do you think this may be a need experienced by other residents?

7:20 pm

**Guided Table Conversations 2.2: What is it about your personal network, other people, or agencies/organizations in Arlington that helps you and your family to find housing/rent solutions?**

**Facilitator Prompt Questions:**

- What ideas do you have about improving the ability to find housing, obtain housing, or receive help/advice with the housing you have?
- Who do you go to for help with housing? Such as churches, schools, libraries, county offices, health centers.
- Do you have the support you need in finding and maintaining housing?
- What type of services would be helpful for you in finding and maintaining the housing you need? Such as assistance to stabilize your current housing or find other housing such as rental assistance, utilities assistance, legal aid services
- For those of you that do not struggle with stable housing, what things do you do to meet this need? What community resources do you find helpful?

7:35 pm

**Harvest 2 (Large Group) Gather challenges and potential solutions from all tables and discuss in the larger group.**

*Transition (Bryna): announce third round of guided table discussion. Transportation is our lifeline! Walkers? Bikers? Anyone take the bus? Uber? Anyone own a car? Get rides with friends? As we come to our final conversation—we recognize if you can't get there –you can't go there! So we hope you will share some of your experiences with us before we go tonight.*

7:50 pm

**Guided Table Conversations 3.1: What, if any challenges have you experienced in obtaining and/or accessing affordable, accessible, safe, and adequate transportation to go to work, shopping, visiting a doctor, etc.?**

**Facilitator Prompt Questions:**

- How do you get around on a daily basis?

- Are you able to afford the transportation you need to get you where you need to go safely and on time?
- What situations or destinations are the most challenging for you to manage with the transportation you have available (ex: school, groceries, job, childcare, school, healthcare, etc.)?
- How often do these challenges/barriers occur? (every week, month, at the end of the month only, on weekends, short-term/long-term; specific times of the year)
- Do these challenges/barriers represent an obstacle in any way? (i.e. work, school, etc.)
- Do you ever receive any financial support for transportation services (bus pass? Taxi vouchers? Other?)
- We heard from many of you that XXX was a problem. Can you explain how this issue affects you and your family?
- For those of you that do not face challenges with transportation, why do you think this may be a need experienced by other residents?

8:05 pm

[Guided Table Conversation 3.2](#): **Before we wrap this portion of the conversation-we want to just go around the table-and see if you have any thoughts about things that COULD help you or other members of the community to solve transportation challenges and or barriers to access them?**

**Facilitator Prompt Questions:**

- Are there any changes to the bus system, schedule, route or operations that would improve your ability to get where you need to go more easily?
- Do you have any ideas about making the transportation you need more affordable? Such as changes in bus schedules or vouchers for transportation.
- For those of you that do not struggle with transportation, what things do you do to meet this need? What community resources do you find helpful?

8:20pm

[HARVEST 3 \(Large group\)](#): **Gather challenges and potential solutions from all tables and discuss in the larger group.**

8:35 pm

[Closing Remarks](#)  
**Nancy and Bryna**

8:50 pm

[Participant's Evaluation and Gift Card Distribution](#)

9:00 pm

**Adjourn/Clean Up**

## APPENDIX III – VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS

**Table 1: Mongolian****Facilitator:** Crystal Sukhee**Notetaker:** Zaya Coughlin**Table 2: Amharic****Facilitator:** Kidist Tesfaye**Notetaker:** Jerry Solomon**Table 3: Arabic\*****Facilitator:** Yasmina Assin**Notetaker:** Eman Elashkar**Table 4: Teens****Facilitator:** Kim Durand**Notetaker:** Sandy Barrett**Observer:** David Cristeal**Table 5: English****Facilitator:** Abby Raphael**Notetaker:** James Meenan**Observer:** Michelle Cowen**Table 6: English****Facilitator:** Nina Janopaul**Notetaker:** Roger Munter**Observers:** Christian Dorsey  
(from 5-7pm)

Matt De Ferranti (from 7-9)

**Table 7: English****Facilitator:** Pierre Holloman**Notetaker:** Hanna Winant**Observer:** Erik Gutshall**Table 8: English****Facilitator:** Mike Collins**Notetaker:** Alice Hogan**Observer:** Errol Chin-Loy**Table 9: English****Facilitator:** Pat Findikoglu**Notetaker:** Laura Elsberg**Observer:** Mark Schwartz**Table 10: English****Facilitator:** Dennis Leach**Notetaker:** Lisa Kaplowitz**Observer:** Samia Byrd**Table 11: English****Facilitator:** Anne Vor der  
Bruegge**Notetaker:** Lisa Wilson**Observer:** Lynne Porfiri**Table 12: Spanish****Facilitator:** Anita  
Friedman/Kathie Panfil**Notetaker:** Alejandra  
Underwood**Table 13: Spanish****Facilitator:** Russell Danao-  
Schroeder**Notetaker:** Robert Sharpe**Table 14: Spanish****Facilitator:** Carmen Romero**Notetaker:** Juan Lamus**Table 15: Spanish****Facilitator:** Eduardo Lopez**Notetaker:** Mike Chiappa**Table 16: Observers****Coordinator:** Renie Joie

Penna-Couttenye

**Table 17: Volunteers****Coordinator:** Tahsin Khan**Flip Chart Recorders**

Debora Goldberg

Connie Owens

Robert "Kevin" Mallison

Hana Asli

**Observers**

Christian Dorsey

Matt De Ferranti

Erik Gutshall

Michelle Cowen

Lynne Porfiri

Samia Byrd

James Meenan

Errol Chin-Loy

David Cristeal

Ron Thompson (Float)