



MEMORANDUM

To: Dan Amstutz
From: Matt Smith & Alyson Fletcher, Nelson\Nygaard
Date: June 1, 2020
Subject: REVISED COVID-19 Public Engagement Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Given the many challenges associated with public engagement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to combat the spread of the virus through social/physical distancing, the engagement strategy initially designed for the Arlington Sustainable Transportation Plan must be adapted to provide the community an opportunity to receive information about the plan and its process, and more importantly, to provide their thoughts, ideas and comments.

Despite these challenges, public engagement continues to be a critical component to successfully developing, and more importantly, implementing a community wide transportation plan. The most important consideration in this revised engagement strategy is reaching as many stakeholders as possible, representing different perspectives and life situations be they geographic, social, economic, or other.

As such, the revised public engagement strategy described below has adapted the initial strategies to accomplish this goal.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GOALS

The revised engagement strategy goals remain the same. The strategy must inform the planning process to identify community priorities and goals, potential roadblocks, and pathways around them. Public engagement is being conducted to:

GOAL: Build awareness of and excitement for the plan

- Acknowledge community concerns
- Share the plan goals, progress, timeline, and next steps
- Communicate why feedback is important and how feedback is being used

GOAL: Reach a variety of constituents and community interests to create recommendations that are comprehensive and equitable

- Target traditionally underrepresented stakeholders in public process, i.e. Communities of Concern - such as people of color, people with disabilities, the elderly, and people with low incomes
- Learn about perceived issues and whether those vary by user group

- Provide varied types of activities and venues through which to provide feedback, recognizing that certain demographics may need specific engagement techniques
- Leverage existing stakeholder networks to engage wider community

GOAL: Inform plan priorities and actions

- Identify where the public experiences issues and what scenarios need to be addressed
- Generate solutions for future projects and maintenance that are sensitive to sustainability concerns
- Identify programming opportunities
- Communicate next steps & foster ongoing community support

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

As included in the original scope for the Arlington Sustainable Transportation Plan, most outreach elements were intended to be the responsibility of the Town. Nelson\Nygaard was to assist staff to provide all information, analysis, and findings in support of the event or task. Given the need to revise a key outreach element – the first Public Forum – we anticipate additional consultant time will be required.

The below strategy is presented in order as to when each element would occur by month. Elements that have been revised are now in red type.

TASK 1: PROJECT LAUNCH COMMUNICATIONS

1.1 Press Release

The Town should issue a press release announcing the kickoff of the Sustainable Transportation Plan process. The release should provide a general project overview, timeline, outreach program (as described below) and link to the online survey.

Lead: Nelson\Nygaard (drafting)
Support: Town of Arlington (refining draft, leading distribution, and press responses)
Timing: Soft Release – Complete on Town News Page
Plan for Additional Release around Time of Online Survey Launch

1.2. Project Website

A web-based landing area for information that could include:

- Project Overview
- Project Timeline
- Documents Library
- Survey Link(s)
- And more...

Lead: Town of Arlington (Site/Page hosting, Writing and Posting Updates) - <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/town-governance/all-boards-and-committees/sustainable-transportation-advisory-committee>

Support: Nelson\Nygaard (Creating a project brand that will be used on the site, submitting deliverables that would be posted by the Town)

Timing: Completed

1.3. Social Media

Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. – can be a powerful engagement tool to gain insights from the public about various project issues and concerns. However, the risk of it turning negative, often from a select few, can undermine a project.

Given COVID-19 concerns, social media has become an important tool to distribute information. However, and as before, we recommend using social media on a limited basis for the project, continuing to focus social media primarily for project announcements and information (e.g. survey, public input opportunities/online meeting information, etc.) Using it to vet strategies and other plan elements should be avoided, however, pointing people to a document for comment is encouraged

. Nelson\Nygaard can advise the Town on their social media strategy if needed and provide raw branded materials the Town can adapt for use on their platforms.

Lead: Town of Arlington (Site/Page hosting, Content, Providing pixel sizes for web banners and social media thumbnails)

Support: Nelson\Nygaard – branded templates for web banner and social media announcements for the Town to adapt and distribute

Timing: Spring 2020-Project End (At time of survey launch and save the dates)
SURVEY LAUNCHED MAY 2020

1.4 Flier / Postcard / Poster Announcements

Nelson\Nygaard can supply drafts of outreach fliers that the Town's staff can distribute via email, snail mail, post at bus stops and along major outdoor activity centers (e.g. along Minute Man Trail), or at essential businesses (e.g. Grocery Store windows as customers wait in line). The purpose of the announcements is to draw attendance to online meetings, surveys, and other engagement options.

Lead: Nelson\Nygaard (Draft flier using brand)

Support: Town of Arlington (Editing, Finalizing, Printing, Distribution)

Timing: 2 weeks in advance of online or in-person events (if allowed in the fall)

2. INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

The Nelson\Nygaard team will conduct up to a total of eight (8) meetings during a period of two days on-site, that could be conducted either as interviews and/or as focus groups (where more than two people may represent interests). Nelson\Nygaard will seek assistance from the Town to identify and coordinate interviews and/or focus groups, including identifying priority people or groups, scheduling times, procuring meeting locations, reminding stakeholders, etc. The Town and/or project ambassadors could host additional meetings if more than 8 are deemed helpful as part of this process.

2.1. Focus Group(s)

Focus groups should be arranged to learn about and discuss topics and issues in which many stakeholders are directly linked. For example, we would recommend a focus group with Town departments responsible for various transportation facilities planning, design, construction, and maintenance (including Planning and Community Development, Engineering, Department of Public Works, etc.).

The goal of focus groups as part of this process is to engage voices less heard in Arlington's planning processes, especially those that could stand the most to gain from strategies that could promote more sustainable transportation options and safety improvements. Given some groups may be harder to organize and reach, we propose hosting meetings across two different days in the process – one day of meetings in March to engage those easier to organize and one later in June, aligning with mobile workshops to meet people where they are as part of a “plan van” type of engagement at housing locations.

Sample target groups include:

- Seniors: Disability Commission, Council on Aging, Senior Housing
- Youth: family, school travel, Safe Routes to Schools (travel survey expected to go out to schools early to mid-March)
- Car-free lifestyle representatives/interest groups
- Low-Income Groups: Arlington Housing Authority housing, Housing Corporation of Arlington housing, etc.

Lead: Nelson\Nygaard

Support: Arlington (coordination, booking venue, outreach, and reminders to stakeholders, hosting additional meetings as needed)

Timing: Targets – A round of meetings in March, a round of meetings in June

3. SURVEY

Surveys are an excellent way to obtain information about transportation conditions, concerns and opportunities. We recommend conducting at a minimum, one survey communitywide (see Task 3.1), but if staff capacity is available at the Town, we would recommend targeted surveys aimed at populations with specific mobility needs.

3.1. Online Survey

Nelson\Nygaard with input from Town staff and the committee will develop an online survey (through surveymonkey.com) to obtain initial thoughts and opinions about transportation priorities. Questions should aim to get information about how people travel within and to and from Arlington, why they make the mode choices they do, and what they would like to see change over time.

A link to the online survey should be shared with as many groups in Town as possible through as many channels as possible: email distribution lists, links on the Town website, flier distribution at public meetings or events, etc.

To meet seniors, school-age children, and other populations of concern, Nelson\Nygaard will ensure the survey includes questions that address their unique issues. Nelson\Nygaard will

develop a paper version of the survey so that it can be taken to Senior Centers, Schools, and Housing locations by the Town of Arlington's street team.

Lead: Nelson\Nygaard (survey development, hosting, and answer-processing)
Support: Arlington (distribution and on-going promotion)
Timing: April 2020 – End of June 2020 (Promote at Forum and Mobile Workshops)

4. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

4.1. ONLINE Public Forum

The Town of Arlington should host a live, Zoom-hosted Sustainable Transportation Plan Forum to introduce the community to the project, provide an overview of existing conditions and seek feedback during an open house session at the close.

The purpose of the meeting remains the same as in the in-person version: 1) the meeting formally introduces the public to the plan process; 2) the public receives an overview of current transportation conditions throughout the community; and 3) the meeting provides an opportunity for the public to provide their thoughts and opinions about transportation in Arlington, identify elements of the network that they like or dislike (including areas where safety is a concern), and to provide their own vision for future sustainable transportation in Arlington.

Nelson\Nygaard suggests the following:

Online Public Forum

Purpose: Recreate the in-person Public Forum originally planned for June 8, 2020.

A public forum can be adapted very successfully as an on-line meeting hosted through Zoom, a platform already used by the Town of Arlington for public board, committee, and other meetings (like this one) during the COVID-19 crisis.

We recommend hosting a highly scripted and moderated Public Forum to accomplish the public outreach goals. Nelson\Nygaard is working with several municipalities to host similar meetings and recommends a format/agenda that is relatively short (an hour is recommended, 1/5 hours max), highly informative and that gives the opportunity for the public to provide their thoughts (during and after the meeting). Participation via computer/tablet is ideal, but participation via phone is also viable. Presenters will make efforts to describe slide content for anyone who may be calling in only.

The meeting will be recorded and posted online following the live event so that people can participate at their convenience. An email and/or phone number for participants to submit questions will be made available for a one- or two-week period. These questions will be answered by the project team (Town and Consultant) and posted online once completed.

Proposed Meeting Agenda/Format: Not to exceed one hour.

1. Welcome remarks from Town of Arlington (5 min)
2. Presentation (not to exceed 30 min):

Much of the presentation will repurpose information and maps included in the Fact Book.

- a. Introduction/Background – Town provides background/context for the plan, and where we are (i.e. schedule)
 - b. Existing Conditions – Town staff (and/or Nelson\Nygaard) provide an overview of existing conditions – demographics, land use/transportation intersection, roadway, traffic, safety, transit, bicycle, parking, and pedestrian findings.
 - c. Goals and Principles – Highlight that feedback received during and after the meeting will be used to develop a set of goals and principles that all plan recommendations will seek to address. Provide overview of how decisions will be made, including goals, objectives, and key metrics for determining which project ideas are most effective.
3. Q&A - Live feedback from participants (30 minutes)
- a. Participants can submit questions/comments in the chat window at any time during the presentation, or during the Q&A. Moderators will determine which questions will be answered live.
 - b. Q&A following the presentation (25 min)
 - i. Not all questions are likely to be answered during the meeting time.
 - ii. Ensure audience that all questions – in the chat window will be answered in writing after the meeting (within 2 weeks of the meeting date and posted online.)
4. Closing/Next Steps
- a. Thank attendees for participating.
 - b. Provide link to online feedback options and information about recording.

Proposed Post-Meeting Engagement - Online

1. Upload meeting and materials online for those who were unable to join live
 - a. Record presentation and post video by COB the following day.
 - b. Develop supplementary info boards providing additional context
 - c. Develop and post an online feedback form/survey to provide an opportunity for open ended input and/or provide feedback on key project goals.
2. Follow-Up Outreach
 - a. Use Social Media and community email lists to inform community members that they can still participate after the event. Must provide links to the Public Forum recording, materials, and deadline for input (1-2 weeks).

Lead: Nelson/Nygaard (Event coordination, hosting, and staffing)

Support: Beta (Supporting content development. Meeting participation and additional assistance optional on a time and materials basis.)

Timing: **Mid- late June 2020** (Avoiding Annual Town Meeting and other planning meeting conflicts)

Nelson\Nygaard Add-On Costs

Depending on the level of effort requested of Nelson\Nygaard, this task would require an add-on to cover costs not allocated during the project bid.

Tasks Include:

- Meeting Presentation
 - o Draft and Submit to Town
 - o Revise based on Comments
- Develop Meeting Format and Attend
 - o Work with town to develop final meeting format
 - o Present Existing Conditions
 - o Q&A Participation
- Develop Online Materials
 - o Draft Feedback Form and Exercises (e.g. prioritize)
- Consolidate and answer questions
 - o Consolidate similar questions (including from post meeting feedback) to not repeat the same answer many times
 - o Answer Questions (in writing)
 - o Review answers with Town (one set of comments)
 - o Revise and Post Answers
- **Total Add-On: (\$2,500, up to \$5,000)**

4.2. Mobile Workshop [REVISED]

It is important for the consultant team to receive direct input from the community. As described in the proposal, we recommend the Nelson\Nygaard team's outreach efforts to focus on two "mobile workshops" which will enable our team to reach residents and stakeholders while they are actively moving about and engaging within the community. This is particularly important given that Arlington is a community with an active, engaged, and educated citizen base.

As originally proposed, while our mobile workshops will employ different engagement techniques, we will look to avoid activities that promote proximity of participants and the sharing or touching of materials. We have also provided options for the first Mobile Workshops – one that does not include staff at the events, another that does.

(Whereas staffed engagement has a much higher rate of participation; passive methods are most effective when they are placed in locations where people are waiting around, not just passing through. We have provided two alternatives below, depending on level of interaction

allowed at the time, the level of comfort of staff to interact; and/or Town policy around in-person public outreach.]

4.2.1. Mobile Workshop #1

The first “mobile workshop” would be held during the summer following the Online Public Forum. The purpose is to provide another avenue to gather input from residents, business owners and visitors at various locations and potentially an existing event or activity.

Option 1: Public Information Boards - Unstaffed

A series of information boards – a condensed display from the Online forum meeting presentation – displayed at outdoor (or indoor if can be safely done) locations where targeted populations are likely to see them.

Possible locations: Town Hall, Community Center, and other public sites (if they reopen) or potentially in lobbies at senior and/or affordable housing developments, or along front of grocery stores.

Input methods:

- Provide a URL to an online input method
 - o Scan a QR code to get to the online survey (excludes those without smartphones)
- Send a text message or leave a voicemail
- Write on the boards or on post-its (no way to ensure materials are sanitized, but hand sanitizer can be provided and risk of COVID transmission from using a pen is low)

Potential drawback: May not generate a significant amount of participation.

- Grocery stores may present the best option (if permission is received from property owner) given those waiting in line to enter are a captive audience.

Option 2: Physically/Socially Distant Street Teams

Team members, wearing masks, bring boards to outdoor locations with significant foot traffic and engage people from a safe distance This would be like the Mobile Workshop originally proposed.

Possible locations: parks and pathways, farmers market, outside grocery stores. Grocery stores may be the best option (if permission is received by property owner), given all shoppers are required to wear masks already, and because those waiting in line are a captive audience.

Input methods:

- Dictate comments to staff, who will write down on board, whiteboard, post-it or other.
- Provide URL to an online input method
- Send a text message or leave a voicemail
- Write on boards with a map or post-it. Hand sanitizer would be made available and/or staff would sanitize all materials.

Option 3: Walkshop and Bikeshop Approach

Pending feedback from the STPAC, should all public events be cancelled during the summer months, another option would be to host several smaller workshops and bikeshops. These would be adapted to adhere to all social/physical distancing guidelines. Participants would need to sign up in advance of the event. Social media, email and other outreach would be conducted.

Consultant Staff (with Town Staff, if available) will lead the “Walkshop” and “Bikeshop” tour to extrapolate input on key Arlington transportation issues from a focus group of stakeholders.

Lead: Nelson\Nygaard
Support: Arlington (coordination, permits if needed, support staffing)
Timing: June-July 2020 (after Online Public Forum)

THE REMAINDER OF THE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY REMAINS AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED GIVEN THE UNCERTAINTY AROUND LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS AROUND COVID-19. SHOULD RESTRICTIONS REMAIN SIMILAR TO TODAY, WE ANTICIPATE SIMILAR CHANGES TO THE 2ND MOBILE WORKSHOP AND PUBLIC FORUM.

4.2.2. Mobile Workshop #2

The second mobile workshop would be held in Fall 2020 during an event or festival to be determined. The purpose of this workshop would be to present draft strategies to enhance Arlington’s transportation now and in the future, collect feedback and

Lead: Nelson\Nygaard
Support: Arlington (coordination, permits if needed, support staffing)
Timing: September 2020

4.3. Public Forum #2: Draft Plan

Based on feedback from the Advisory Committee, we propose for the City to host a second Transportation Plan Public Forum. This second meeting is recommended to introduce the public to the Draft Plan.

At the meeting, the Town would provide an overview presentation of the project findings, and the draft strategy. Following the presentation, a series of exercises for the public to provide input – likely by topical tables (e.g. ped and bike, transit, car, etc.).

Feedback received at the event will be used to inform the final plan strategy.

Lead: Arlington (Event coordination, hosting, and staffing)
Support: Nelson\Nygaard (Supporting content development. Meeting participation and additional assistance optional on a time and materials basis.)
Timing: November 2020