

Subject: Revise and open street use in 22202 keep pedestrians and cyclists safe during COVID-19 restrictions.
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Date: 4/24/20, 4:28 PM
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Dear County Board Members,

Thank you and County staff for your incredible hard work to keep us safe during the coronavirus crisis.

We, the undersigned presidents of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association and Crystal City Civic Association, are writing to you to encourage the County to implement safety measures for pedestrians and bicycles on our neighborhood streets to enable social distancing. Even with the reality of significant budget cuts and limited resources, the County could be doing more to enable safe use of our public right of ways. We have residents that are willing and able to volunteer to supplement any limited County resources, and stakeholders such as the Crystal City BID have also expressed an interest and a willingness to provide resources.

Walkability in 22202 then and now

Pedestrians in 22202 have always been underserved, as contiguous, wide and well-maintained sidewalks are lacking in many areas. Our Livability 22202 efforts highlighted the need to improve walkability... during normal times. During COVID-19 times, it's even more imperative to improve walkability as vehicular traffic is at low ebb in our area while walking and cycling are at an all time high as residents are sheltering in place.

Arlingtonians are encouraged to exercise during the coronavirus crisis, both indoors and outside, as long as we follow containment precautions. With County parks now closed and trails frequently overcrowded, we are increasingly desperate to find outdoor space where we can practice social distancing while we exercise or actively travel on essential errands. Yes, some of us live in single family homes on quiet streets, but the majority of our local population lives in high-density housing with limited options for outdoor activity.

Our residents have generally been complying with stay at home and distancing recommendations, but there are inevitable conflicts when our bike lanes are limited and our sidewalks are too narrow to keep a safe distance from our fellow travelers. **Outdoor exercise is essential to our physical, mental, and spiritual health, yet we are putting ourselves at risk of coronavirus exposure while being outdoors because of limited space for essential social distancing.**

A call to action

We suggest creating a **temporary network** of shared bike-ped lanes from underused lanes and parking spaces on our streets. This network will provide safe, connected routes from places where large numbers of residents live to places where residents need to go.

Creating such a network of safe passages for cyclists and pedestrians is a key component in the Crystal City Sector Plan, the Livability 22202 document, the County Pedestrian Element, Bicycle Element, and Vision Zero program. Our priorities for this network are primarily in the northeast section of 22202, where residents live in high density housing, fewer residents drive, many community resources, including two grocery stores, are within walking distance, and existing sidewalks are overcrowded. Key transit options are also along our proposed network,

including two Metro stops, many bus stops, and the Crystal City Connector, which links to the Mount Vernon Trail; although use of these has plummeted, they will be critical transportation components through a recovery. We are recommending streets that are relatively flat and straight, creating better visibility for everyone and easier travel for all pedestrians, including those with disabilities.

Other jurisdictions have been proactive in taking temporary measures to alter some roads to improve pedestrian and bike access.

- Oakland California converted 74 miles for streets for pedestrian and bike usage. [\[sfchronicle.com\]](https://www.sfchronicle.com)
- DC and Montgomery have begun responding to resident requests. [\[washingtonpost.com\]](https://www.washingtonpost.com), [\[twitter.com\]](https://twitter.com)

And recently two resident columnists have publicly called for this measure to be considered for our roads;

- What's Next: Street Forward by Nicole Merlene. [\[arlnow.com\]](https://www.arlnow.com)
- Making rooms; Please give us space for social distancing by Jane Green [\[arlnow.com\]](https://www.arlnow.com)

Starting points

By reserving currently empty travel lanes and parking spaces for cyclists and pedestrians and to make some of our quiet neighborhood streets pedestrian priority (temporary woonerfs), Arlington can help ensure the safety of its residents while maintaining our well-being in these difficult times.

This could be as simple as closing off a single lane or parking on certain streets using cones or barriers, similar to what is often done along Crystal Drive, 12th Street, and Army Navy Drive every time we have a 5k or marathon race, which is at least 10 times a year. Adjustments to sidewalk space such as collapsing cafe zones could also provide immediate relief.

Selectively and just temporarily reducing barely needed travel lanes and parking spaces should not negatively impact vehicular traffic. We encourage the County to try it, monitor it, and make changes if necessary - just like the County is currently doing for construction work on Columbia Pike. We will find local volunteers to help make it work.

There are several multilane streets we would recommend as rebalancing candidates to provide more space for bike and pedestrians:

- S. Hayes from Army-Navy to 18th, 18th from Hayes to Crystal Drive. This corridor connects activities around two Metro stations and is a primary corridor for walkers and bikers to reach the Mt Vernon Trail. 18th is one of only two streets that safely connects Aurora Highlands to Crystal City. The sidewalks on both sides of 18th between Fern and Eads are only 4' wide, making safe passage impossible currently.
- S. Joyce from Army-Navy to 15th. Opening Joyce gives residents of River House and Pentagon Row safer options and gives all 22202 residents safer access to Harris Teeter grocery store, Walgreens, Pentagon Row restaurants, and transit.
- 12th Street S. from Hayes to Crystal Drive, with conversion of at least one lane on Crystal Drive for its length - Crystal Drive is a critical bike-ped passage that has significantly overcrowded sidewalks, and the northbound transit lane does not give any travel time benefit to buses in our current low-traffic state. In fact, Metroway is not currently operating, making those unused dedicated lanes a perfect test case opportunity. 12th Street S, particularly adjoining Met Park, experiences very high levels of pedestrian activity. 12th Street is the only other street that safely connected Crystal City to Aurora Highlands/Pentagon City. Currently Crystal City has no grocery store or drug store, so traveling on 12th to reach these stores in Pentagon City is a critical need.
- Potomac Avenue, from Crystal Drive to 4MR bridge: Potomac Avenue, which is a key link for cyclists and

pedestrians between Arlington and Alexandria, has no sidewalk on the east side and non-contiguous sidewalk on the west side. As Potomac Avenue is one of the four streets the County plans to resurface this year, we recommend creating a shared bike-ped lane on the east side.

We also encourage the County to make select low-traffic neighborhood streets temporarily woonerfs/pedestrian priority streets, using such measures as local-only traffic restrictions, temporary traffic calming materials. Any of the residential streets in Aurora Highlands would make great candidates. Many of these local streets are already de facto pedestrian priority during the coronavirus outbreak and making the change official would only require simple signage, community education, and volunteer monitoring. With local knowledge, we stand ready to assist the County in selecting, conducting outreach, and helping to maintain these local street changes.

We understand that, on April 7, key County commission/committee chairs sent a letter to the County requesting creating bike-ped travel lanes on select 2-lane streets, and that the County response was not to modify current street configurations at this time, in part because of staff engineering and enforcement constraints. With the outlook on shutdowns tending toward extended closures, and possible intermittent recurrences of COVID 19 over the coming year, we ask that the County work on planning and implementing a rebalanced transportation network now. Meeting such resident quality-of-life needs for an uncertain quarantine period is a necessary part of a successful long-term COVID 19 response.

We enthusiastically add our support to the April 7 request, ask the County to try a model street conversion, and offer the streets in 22202 as a place for a much-needed pilot project.

Thank you.

/Scott Miles/
President, Aurora Highlands Civic Association

/Carol Fuller/
President, Crystal City Civic Association



18th St S & S Fern St; Pedestrians sharing travel lanes with cars



12th St S & S Eads St; Pedestrians forced into unnecessarily reduced sidewalks