

# **Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization**

## **Strategic Plan FY 2018**

**November 30, 2016**

## **Executive Summary**

***VISION: Columbia Pike – Arlington’s oldest and newest Main Street, where authentic diverse neighborhoods connect to the world.***

The Columbia Pike community is home to about 38% of Arlington’s residents. It is a community rich in diversity in all its forms, with a strong culture of inclusion, points of pride and affection all who live here. The economic condition is mixed. Its strengths are a convenient location, proximity to Washington, DC, and affordability, yet it lags behind the rest of Arlington in revitalization. Its weaknesses are limited internal mobility along a four-mile strip that lacks a retail critical mass, a sluggish market for office and retail, an uneven appearance, and a lack of major real estate ownership engagement and trust. Although the real estate along the Pike frontage alone is valued at about \$3 billion, only 37% of the Pike’s allowable by-right density has been developed.

CPRO, established 30 years ago, now sees the need to evolve. It has been an organization promoting change in the physical environment of the Pike which is only partially built, but mostly planned through the Form Based Code and Neighborhoods Form Based Code. With the County’s substantial investment, streetscape plans are moving through stages of reconstruction. Now CPRO needs to more actively engage people and businesses in the places being created through new construction, while preserving the character of the Pike community and strengthening existing businesses. With the cooperation of residents and businesses alike, CPRO can create an inspiring vision for the Pike’s future that will be embraced by all those citizens living nearby who will want to share in what the Pike has to offer.

CPRO is a long-standing and trusted organization, connected to the community, businesses and residents, with credibility with the County government. But its effectiveness is hampered by inadequate public/private leadership support, lack of a compelling vision, defined strategy and clarity of purpose. This Strategic Plan for 2018 and beyond is designed to give CPRO the direction and support it needs to shape and share the narrative of the Pike as the cool, authentic, ethnically diverse and welcoming place that it has been. At the same time, CPRO will collaborate with Arlington County to bring new economic vitality, build on its competitive advantages of price, value and proximity, and reinforce the good plans already in place. The five primary strategies are:

1. Improving the Pike experience through place-making
2. Sustaining community engagement
3. Marketing and communicating the Pike’s assets
4. Strengthening CPRO’s infrastructure
5. Catalyzing new development

## VISION:

### **Columbia Pike – Arlington’s oldest and newest Main Street, where authentic diverse neighborhoods connect to the world.**

Columbia Pike is no longer thought of only as a road, but rather represents a community of roughly 38 percent of Arlington County’s entire population. The eastern end of the Pike, anchored by the Pentagon and the Air Force Memorial, with views of the Potomac River and Washington, DC, has the potential to be an impressive monumental gateway to a revitalized Columbia Pike Main Street. The western end, a blend of ethnic and demographic diversity, epitomizes the Pike’s culture of inclusion. 22204 is truly the World in a Zip Code. The Pike today presents an opportunity for place-making, for celebration, and for economic development.

The four-and-a-half-mile stretch in-between these two points includes approximately 32,000 households and 1.5 million square feet of gross commercial floor area -- yet it is only about 37% of total by-right development potential. Because of its relative affordability in comparison to the County’s Metro corridors, further development and enhancement of the Pike provides opportunity to expand Arlington’s tax base. The Pike is centrally located within the relatively affluent Washington D.C. metropolitan area, and shares Arlington’s strengths as a whole, with a low crime rate and excellent schools.

The goals of the Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Area Plan, adopted by the County in 2012, are to foster a healthy, diverse community with high quality of life along the Pike and vibrant, economically-strong, mixed-use commercial centers. The plan calls for a safe, pedestrian-friendly corridor with attractive buildings and tree-lined streets, public art and open spaces that link the neighborhoods with the commercial corridor and the region. Flowers in the tree boxes, banners on light poles, music and cafés enlivening the streets. All elements of the planning process in which Arlington has invested heavily.

Just as importantly, Arlington is making significant investments in the Pike’s infrastructure. The County is already rebuilding gas, water and sewer utilities, and undergrounding electrical and communications utilities -- investments which would otherwise be done piecemeal only when paid for by developers in other parts of the County. On the Pike, the County is building an improved streetscape with wider sidewalks, street lights, and other amenities, and rebuilding the roadway itself. This work is proceeding in phases, with later phases including a realignment of the Pike at the east end, near the Air Force Memorial and Arlington Cemetery. In the west end, the County opened the Arlington Mill Community Center three years ago.

Nearly 72,000 residents live within 23 census tracts located a half-mile, or a 15-minute walk from the Pike. With a median household income of \$64,000 in 2000, the overall disposable income within the corridor was \$1.74 billion, of which \$720 million was directed toward retail sales.

The assessed value of housing and commercial office space of this stretch of Arlington County is \$3 billion, counting properties just one block deep along the Pike. With more

attention and resources allocated to this significant segment of Arlington, the County's tax base could be expanded significantly, and quality of life for citizens could likewise be improved significantly, with access to thriving businesses in a walkable "downtown" business district.

It should also be noted that while the Pike is often thought of as an east-west commuting corridor, it also contains five commercial nodes that serve residents to the north and south at key intersections. These north/south areas can be drawn from and the broader community served from all points of the compass.

Glebe Road and George Mason Drive, in particular, are heavily travelled north/south routes. Their intersections with the Pike at these commercial nodes should serve as the "downtown" for those living or working to the north and south, as well as to the east and west along the Pike. The anticipated project at George Mason Drive will add a public gathering place to bring new energy and a focal point for the community, as it does today. The new building at Glebe Road is already bringing new commercial activity in a walkable location at the intersection of two of Arlington's most important travel arteries. These arteries should be seen as bringing people *to* the Pike, not past or across it. Continued work with the County government on improving north/south transit options will support these commercial nodes.

As work is ongoing with streetscape and infrastructure projects, and new residential buildings draw in potential customers, space is created for more businesses, and new public open spaces become available. These elements present the opportunity to create an avenue that is a draw in and of itself -- with pleasant walking and gathering spaces, public art, and an incredible array of talent and backgrounds among the residents. The Pike is already a place like no other. It can maintain that authenticity while fostering community and economic prosperity.

Having CPRO as a reliable, on-the-ground neighborhood partner helps ensure AED's success in the economic development of this community. With proper resources and staffing, CPRO is an important player in ensuring the Pike's future viability.

## **2016 Strategic Planning Retreat**

The cancellation of the Columbia Pike streetcar and a history of inadequate funding for CPRO, combined with changes in CPRO's board and staff leadership, have led to a period of uncertainty for the economic development of Columbia Pike, and for the future sustainability of CPRO.

In May of 2014, the CPRO board had adopted a strategic plan that incorporated board and staff development and governance, communications and place-making activities -- all based on the assumption that the Columbia Pike streetcar project would go forward. When the streetcar was cancelled in the fall of 2014, the strategic plan was not implemented, and it became clear that a broader effort was needed to re-calibrate efforts to revitalize Columbia Pike, and to assess CPRO's role in that undertaking.

The CPRO board of directors voted to undertake another professionally-led strategic planning process in July, 2016. The goal was to incorporate input from our business, residential

and governmental partners so that CPRO can develop a set of programs which support CPRO's and the County's goals for economic progress on Columbia Pike.

The policy framework for revitalization of Columbia Pike is in place with adoption of the Columbia Pike Initiative, the Form Based Code and Neighborhoods Area Form Based Code. The conceptual design of the future Columbia Pike has been created and in some cases brought to fruition. Economic revitalization has begun, and some new development has been built, creating new businesses, residences, and public spaces. Yet substantial retail space remains unfilled, and the success of businesses along the Pike is uncertain.

Columbia Pike needs new marketing and promotion efforts to entice investment to build within the plans that have been developed, to attract new businesses, and to bring in customers to patronize these businesses, both existing and new. The Pike also needs to fulfill the promise of built (and planned) public spaces as lively, clean and safe centers of the community. These needs suggest that CPRO's focus shift from leadership on *planning* revitalization to leadership on *promoting implementation* of those plans. CPRO's role should be to create a strong business environment, and a pleasant and walkable living environment, and to continue to foster a sense of community.

Together with the County, CPRO needs to draw investment, businesses, and patrons into the community. Particular focus is needed on those sections of the Pike -- especially on the west and far eastern ends -- that have not seen the same level of new economic development and activity as the more central areas. This plan is designed to improve the conditions for business on the Pike, through a cleaner more attractive street environment, branding of the Pike (branding being the promise of an experience), stronger and more consistent communication of the Pike's assets to the broader community, and using places on the Pike to engage people. It is the expectation that as these conditions are improved, more direct actions to recruit businesses can be undertaken, by CPRO, by AED or by some combination of the two. These actions would be the next step in the overall strategy, requiring additional resources not included here.

Just as the Pike Neighborhoods Plan is designed to avoid displacing current residents as new residential development comes to the Pike, CPRO's goal is to avoid displacing current businesses as more businesses come to the Pike. Working with AED and Pike businesses, CPRO should lead a business preservation strategy for the Pike. Part of this strategy may be to convene Pike businesses to determine if they would like to form an association to promote their common interests.

CPRO's outreach program will be to people of all cultures and of all economic stations. Ethnic, cultural and economic diversity and a strong culture of inclusion are the essence of the Pike community. It is who we are. It is who we will be in the future. CPRO is dedicated to that future.

## Making a New Strategic Plan

In June 2016, CPRO contracted with an experienced downtown executive to help establish an auxiliary revitalization plan. Rich Bradley, recently retired director of the Downtown DC BID and former head of the International Downtown Association (IDA), the professional association of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the U.S., Canada and Europe, led a board/staff retreat on August 8 to help guide CPRO in framing a plan for FY 18, FY 19 and FY 20. The retreat was generously hosted by David M. Peete of B.M. Smith, a property owner with deep roots in the community for over 100 years.

The desire of the CPRO board of directors is to stabilize and strengthen the CPRO organization so it can engage in meaningful revitalization activities in the coming years. A draft strategic plan was discussed with the County Manager on September 29 and was the topic of a work session with the County Board on October 4. The CPRO board discussed the strategic plan on October 22 with the Pike Presidents Group, who represent the 10 civic associations along the Pike. This work plan will be formally submitted to the Manager by December 1, for County Board review and approval in April 2017. We hope the plan can be implemented in FY18.

The group's first exercise was to conduct a SWOT analysis, determine broad strategies to pursue over the next three years, and identify infrastructure changes CPRO and the County would have to make in order to meet the new challenge of a changed development landscape.

## Present Conditions for Columbia Pike and CPRO Columbia Pike

### Strengths

Diversity in all its forms: ethnic and demographic; uses; economy  
Convenient Location – Proximity to Washington, DC  
Affordability  
Culture of inclusion

### Weaknesses

Internal mobility  
Sluggish market for office and retail  
Four-mile strip lacks critical retail mass  
Uneven appearance  
Ownership engagement and trust

### Opportunities

Build on competitive advantages of price, values and proximity  
Shape a narrative of place -- cool, genuine, authentic ethnic diversity  
Reinforce good plans that are already in place

## **CPRO**

### Strengths

Long-standing and trusted organization  
New staff  
Connected to the community – businesses and residents  
Credibility with County government

### Weaknesses

Funding  
Inadequate public/private leadership support  
Undefined strategy and clarity of purpose  
Stagnant membership  
No compelling vision

### Opportunities

Fresh energy  
Focus attention on place-making, place management, and place branding  
Create a Pike vision for the future that many can embrace and be inspired by  
Deploy a branding strategy to elevate awareness of CPRO's purpose and vision  
Its niche is cool and diverse  
Push for more private and County support

## **PRIMARY STRATEGIES**

These five strategies are in addition to CPRO's continuing leadership promoting the Form Based Code for commercial areas and the Neighborhoods Form Based Code and other initiatives to promote revitalization.

It should be noted that this plan does *not* address needed transportation improvements on the Pike, not because the improvements are not urgently required, but because they are not being implemented by CPRO. Plans for increasing capacity, ridership and frequency of service are being implemented by County transportation staff as directed by the County Board.

It must be noted further that these strategies are contingent on funding for the staff necessary to implement them.

- 1. Improving the Pike experience through place-making**
- 2. Sustaining community engagement**
- 3. Marketing and communicating the Pike's assets**
- 4. Strengthening CPRO's infrastructure**

## **5. Catalyzing new development ACTIVATING STRATEGIES**

### **1. Improving the Pike Experience**

Place-making goes beyond just creating and managing pleasant physical public spaces. It is the effort to draw people into those spaces, so that community members are engaged with each other; people can go there to expect a pleasant experience; “buzz” is created by businesses and activities. It is what makes a collection of buildings a home town.

#### **Staff: Operations, Events and Communications**

- Continue ongoing events programs
- Farmers Market at Pike Park
- Support a second Farmers Market at the west end of the Pike
- Columbia Pike Blues Festival
- Movie Nights at Penrose Square and Arlington Mill
- Fall Wine and Craft Beer Festival
- Provide enhanced maintenance services
  - Contract with a team of workers to keep the Pike clean and free of debris
- Establish beautification program: landscaping, banners & signage

### **2. Sustaining community engagement**

As an organization, CPRO needs to be engaged with the community, both communicating about news and information and listening to community concerns to act on them through CPRO or as liaison to the county government. CPRO’s strong relationship with the Pike Presidents Group needs to be sustained and strengthened. Community engagement can also help CPRO leverage volunteer efforts on behalf of the Pike community.

#### **Staff: Communications**

- Enhance website and other communications vehicles
- Hold information forums, at least annually
- Expand community membership in CPRO

### **3. Marketing and communicating the Pike’s assets**

In order to serve as an information clearinghouse on Columbia Pike, CPRO must update its website and other collateral materials to ensure uniform branding of all of CPRO’s communication vehicles. It must also harness social media, e-news and media outreach to share its story with a wide audience, grow its membership and sponsorship bases, and increase engagement with all audiences. Most importantly, CPRO must raise awareness of the role it plays in the economic development of South Arlington.

#### **Staff: Communications and Events**

- Create a robust communications platform
  - Target community
  - Target consumers outside immediate neighborhoods
  - Target investors



- Undertake brand analysis  
Develop a brand campaign (after analysis is completed)
- Create informational and marketing materials like business directories and maps
- Catalyze joint marketing opportunities of Pike businesses

#### **4. Strengthening CPRO's Infrastructure**

Over the years, inadequate funding has forced CPRO staff -- one full-time executive director and now two part-time staffers -- to 'make-do' the best they can with donated equipment, donated services, and their own donated time, without a benefit package of any significance. To encourage staff retention, a first-time package of modest employee benefits was included in the 2017 budget. This past year, the vulnerability of cost-cutting led to a disastrous result -- the complete loss of our web site for over two months, resulting in a loss of event revenue and credibility in the community. With antiquated equipment, CPRO is hindered in its ability to conduct robust membership or sponsorship campaigns, and conduct business in an efficient manner.

##### **Staff: Executive Director, full staff**

Diversify funding sources

- Work with County to bring Economic Development resources to CPRO
- Raise funds from private sources -- grants, sponsorships and memberships
- Explore the possibility of a special assessment district

Evaluate and improve organizational structure and resource capacity

- Expand staff at proper levels of compensation to meet organizational demands
- Create a plan for staff development, compensation, evaluation and retention
- Inventory and upgrade office equipment

Strengthen governance of CPRO Board

- Review Bylaws annually
- Establish responsibilities for each Board committee
- Develop a Board handbook
- Develop process for Nominations Committee
- Undertake Board education, as it relates to governance and fundraising
- Ensure openness by posting organizational information on the CPRO website

#### **5. Catalyzing New Development and Businesses**

##### **Staff: Operations Director**

- Undertake market analysis\*
- Retail, Residential, Office
- Create a baseline of information
- Convene key stakeholders and landowners
- Hold information forums
- Identify business and development incentives
- Explore the creation of a TIF District

\*The market analysis is envisioned as a one-time effort using consultant services to create an information baseline regarding businesses and commercial and residential property along the Pike; to analyze opportunities presented by the Pike's location within a heavily populated and prosperous region; and to identify strategies for marketing for development, residential real estate of all types, and new and existing businesses. This analysis would help inform and guide CPRO's efforts over the subsequent years.