

Arlington Electoral Board Strategic Plan

MISSION The Electoral Board and Office of Elections maintains an accurate list of registered voters and administers elections fairly and efficiently in an open, transparent, and equitable manner.	CHALLENGES Growth of County Since 2015 Arlington’s population has grown by 27,000 residents. Growth is expected to continue. We expect an increase of 48,000 voters by 2050. Population growth adds stress to current election infrastructure, such as the number of polling places, poll workers, ballots, and voting equipment needed. Changes to Election Law & Trends There have been several changes to Virginia election law since 2018 including eliminating the requirement for voters to provide a reason to vote absentee by mail and in person, addition of a permanent absentee ballot list that allows voters to automatically receive a mail ballot, addition of same day registration, automatic voter registration and use of ranked choice voting for county board races. Each of these changes requires and adjustment to procedures and resources. We have seen a steady increase in both by mail and in person absentee voters, but the percentage of voters who choose to vote before Election Day is heavily dependent on the type of election.	CHALLENGES (CONT.) Facilities To maintain manageable lines on election day, our objective is to maintain polling places at the 2,500 – 3,500 active voter range. We added 12 precincts since 2000, and we anticipate needing to add 13 precincts by 2045 to accommodate growth. Our biggest needs continue to be along the Metro corridors, where there are high concentrations of residential density. Traditionally, public buildings such as schools, community centers, and churches are used as polling places. These buildings are rarely built in conjunction with new development projects, so other options must be considered. Outreach and Voter Education The Office must navigate challenges associated with legal and ethical limitations, changing rules and systems, and information accuracy when conducting outreach and education campaigns.
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KEY AREAS Outreach and Voter Education Enhance engagement strategies and educational initiatives to better inform voters. Addressing Challenges Associated with Population Growth Recommends ways to address the challenges associated with population growth. Meeting Facility Needs Recommends ways to ensure the adequacy of current election polling places, early voting sites, and facilities and identified future infrastructure requirements. Election Security and Infrastructure Recommend enhancements to the Office’s physical and digital security protocols, equipment lifecycle planning, and compliance with state and federal guidelines. Due to the sensitivity of this area, goals will be redacted in accordance with Virginia law.	ACTION PLAN Outreach and Voter Education - Improve awareness about capabilities of staff (e.g., capacity to run trainings or informational sessions for outside groups). - Increase reach of communication channels (e.g., social media, websites, events). - Develop a robust network of local neighborhood, civic and religious groups that can assist in amplifying information and messages about elections. - Be more proactive in communicating on emerging issues through media such as YouTube videos, Instagram reels, online “AMA” type Q&A sessions, etc. - Create a library of informational and instructional resources available to outside groups for use in their own programming. - Become a “trusted resource” and subject-matter experts for policymakers, Virginia election administrators, and the public at large about election law and process. Addressing Challenges Associated with Population Growth - Closely monitor voter wait times, particularly at precincts with more than 4,000 active registered voters - Increase training for Precinct Leadership to ensure same-day registration does not create congestion throughout precinct. - For the 2028 Presidential election, find an alternative to Long Branch that is more accessible to voters	ACTION PLAN (CONT.) Meeting Facility Needs - A site plan agreement will help when the time comes to open a new precinct. By code, a precinct has a minimum and maximum number of voters. Once the maximum is reached, a new precinct will need to be in place. - Redrawing boundary lines will also allow further analysis on whether new polling places are necessary and how soon they are necessary. Election Security and Infrastructure - Develop continuity plan. - Identify alternative sites if office or warehouse are not accessible. Formalize agreements with ACG for use of sites. - CCTV, key card access, and security lighting at warehouse. - Install video intercom system for access to warehouse. - Install barriers to prevent access over walls at warehouse. - Seal concrete floors are warehouse.
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BACKGROUND

Since the adoption of the original strategic plan in 2018, Arlington County has experienced significant demographic, technological, law, and procedural changes that have reshaped the administration of elections. The Electoral Board and Office of Elections have responded to these shifts with a commitment to transparency, accessibility, and security, while maintaining the integrity and efficiency of the electoral process.

The 2018 update to the strategic plan identified key challenges in four areas: population growth, voting trends, facilities, and labor force capacity. It also established three guiding goals: treating the voter as a customer, enhancing security, and ensuring transparency. As we look forward, this updated plan builds upon those foundations, incorporating lessons learned, technological advancements, and a renewed focus on accessibility, integrity, and resilience in election administration.

METHODS

To ensure the strategic plan reflects the needs and priorities of Arlington's electorate, the Electoral Board initiated a collaborative planning process in 2025 that included internal assessments and public engagement. Central to this effort was the formation of 4 working groups tasked with exploring a key strategic area:

Outreach and Voter Education

This group focused on enhancing engagement strategies and educational initiatives to better inform voters. Participants included community members, advocacy organizations, and election staff, who provided input on outreach channels, messaging, and accessibility.

Understanding Challenges Associated with Population Growth

This group assessed the impact of Arlington's continued demographic expansion on election infrastructure, staffing, and service delivery. Members reviewed population forecasts, precinct capacity, and voter registration trends to inform long-term planning.

Assessing Facility Needs

This group evaluated the adequacy of current election polling places, early voting sites, and facilities and identified future infrastructure requirements. Topics included accessibility, storage, security, and training space.

Election Security and Infrastructure

This internal working group, composed of staff and security consultants, reviewed physical and digital security protocols, equipment lifecycle planning, and compliance with state and federal guidelines. Due to the sensitivity of this area, goals will be redacted in accordance with Virginia law.

Findings from each group were synthesized into recommendations. The planning process also included:

- Review of historical election data and voter behavior trends.

- Facility walkthroughs and assessments.
- Public comment on a draft plan.

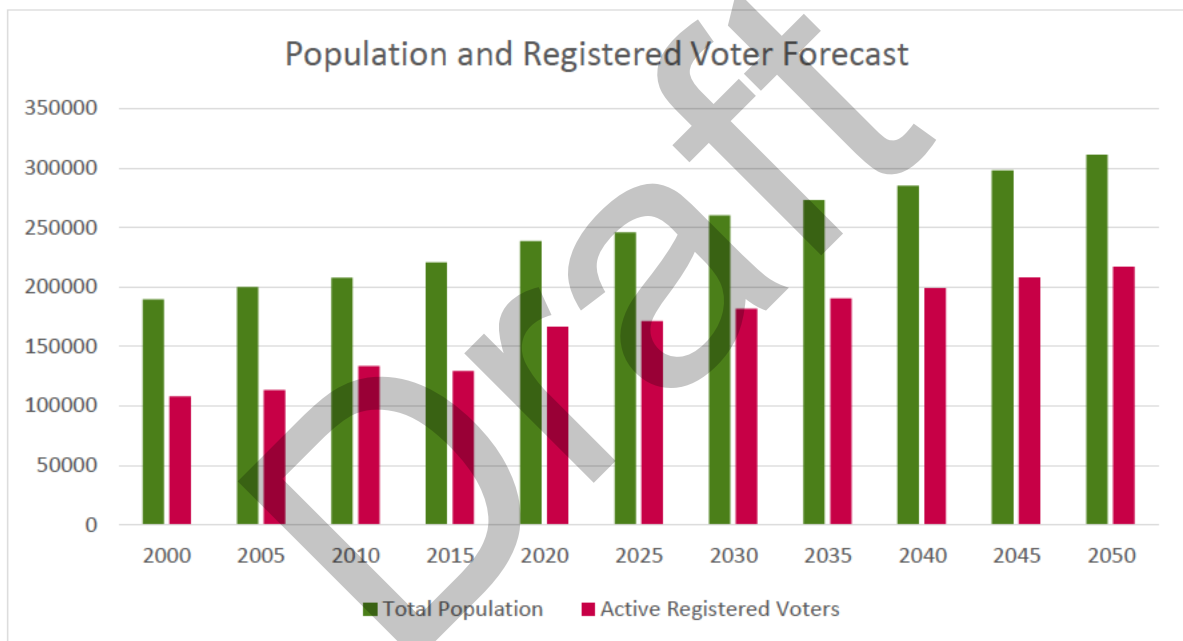
CHALLENGES

Over the next 20 years the Arlington Electoral Board anticipates the following challenges or population growth, shifts in voting trends related to election law changes, strains on facilities, and challenges specific to outreach and voter education.

Population Growth

Since 2015 Arlington's population has grown by more than 27,000 residents and 36,000 registered voters. Growth is expected to continue. We expect to add another 48,000 voters by 2050.

Population growth adds stress to current election infrastructure, such as the number of polling places, poll workers, ballots, and voting equipment needed.

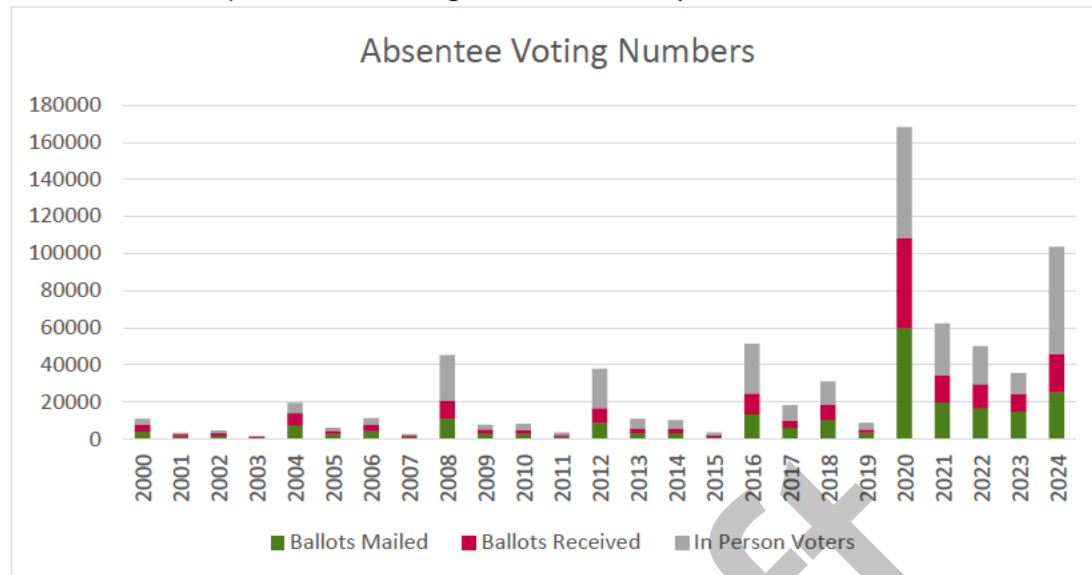


Shifts in Voting Trends Related to Election Law Changes

In addition to population growth, there has been a dramatic shift in the way voters choose to cast their ballots. Voters are increasingly likely to choose to vote before election day, either by mail or in person absentee. While this trend has been evident in all recent elections, it has been particularly prevalent in Presidential general elections. For example, voters casting pre-election day votes increased from 2,343 in 2015 (6% of all voters) to 20,761 in 2023 (32% of all voters). In two recent Presidential elections, pre-election day votes increased from 37,832 in 2016 (31% of all voters) to 78,284 in 2024 (60% of all voters).

Increased pre-election day voting has been facilitated by changes in Virginia election law enacted following completion of the Electoral Board's 2018 Strategic Plan. These changes include a law authorizing voters to cast absentee ballots (either by mail or in person) without being required provide a reason for their decision; a law authorizing Virginians to both register to vote and to cast a ballot on the same day; a law authorizing voters to add their names to a permanent absentee list and thereby

automatically receive a mailed ballot; authorizing mail and in person absentee voting up to 45 days before an election; and automatic registration at the Department of Motor Vehicles.



Barring repeal of these new laws, the Electoral Board does not anticipate that the percentage of votes cast on election day will return to historic levels in the near future. Accordingly, future population growth is likely to have its greatest impact on maintenance of early voting locations and a lesser impact on election-day polling places.

Strains on Facilities and Resources

Election Day Polling Places

Arlington County currently has 54 physical precinct locations plus an additional 2-3 satellite locations at community centers for early voting depending on the election and the County's ordinance. During early voting, the Office of Voter Registration & Elections and satellite locations serve as polling places. On election day, voters vote at one of 54 precincts, not at the satellite locations.

The number of election-day polling places in Arlington has increased with the rising population. The increase in polling places has been driven by two factors. First, Virginia law imposes limits on the size of electoral precincts. Arlington is required to draw new precinct lines whenever 4,000 or more votes are cast in a single precinct in a Presidential election. Any precincts that are established or redrawn because of that occurrence may not contain more than 5,000 registered voters. Second, the Electoral Board has adopted a policy goal of minimizing voter lines on election day, thereby reducing the time required to cast one's ballot.

Those two factors led to the establishment of 12 new precincts since 2000. The 2018 Strategic Plan anticipated needing to add 13 additional precincts by 2045 to accommodate the anticipated increase in registered voters. Because of the dramatic decrease in the percentage of voters who cast their ballots on election day, there may be a lessened need for new precincts in the coming years.

In particular, in the 2024 Presidential election, no precinct in Arlington came anywhere near the 4,000-vote threshold imposed by Virginia law. The largest election-day turnout was at Precinct 118, where 1,453 voters cast ballots. Although voter registration in Arlington is anticipated to increase by 30% by

2050, in no precinct would a 30% increase in election-day turnout trigger the need under Virginia law to create new precincts.

Rather, increasing the number of precincts is likely to come about based on the Electoral Board's desire to avoid lengthy voter lines. In the 2018 Strategic Plan, we sought to maintain manageable voter lines by establishing an objective of maintaining polling places at the 2,500 – 3,500 active voter range. But in the intervening years, a significantly decreased percentage of active voters has chosen to vote on election day. For that reason, we anticipate increasing our guidelines for the acceptable limit on the number of active voters in each precinct. We note that two precincts had more than 5,000 active registered voters in 2024, while nine precincts had more than 4,000 active registered voters; none of those precincts experienced significant congestion during the 2024 Presidential election. Indeed, there were no reports of long wait times on election day.

The Electoral Board should closely monitor election-day voter wait times at polling places. Any indication that a precinct's large active-voter population is likely to generate voter lines warrants creation of a new precinct. The biggest need for new precincts is likely to arise along Metro corridors, which have high residential density and are the areas of fastest population growth.

Traditionally, public buildings such as schools, community centers, and churches are used as polling places. Structures of that sort are rarely built in conjunction with new development projects, so other options must be considered.

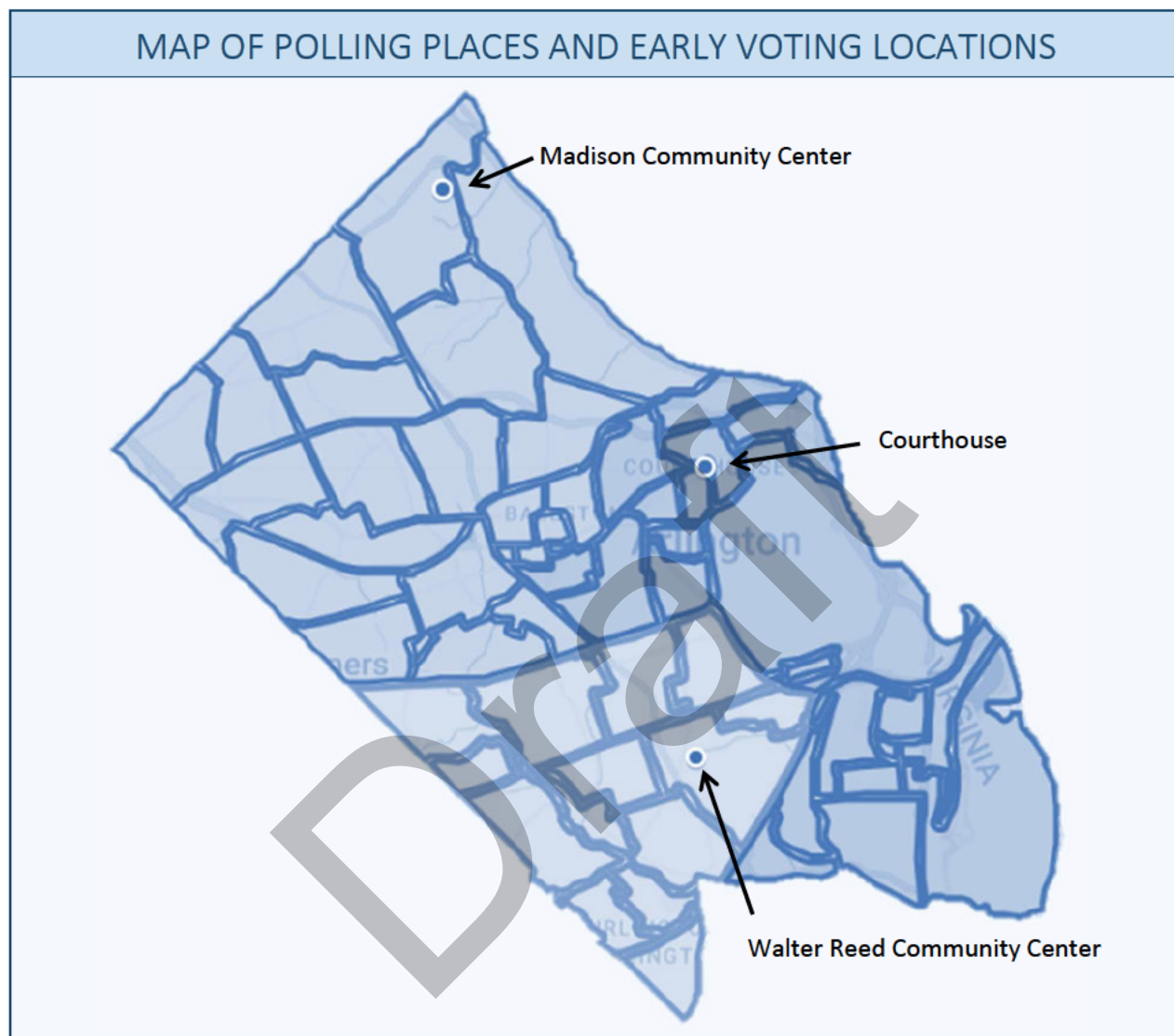
To overcome this obstacle, the County uses site plan agreements in high rise developments to provide conditions for voting locations. We have seen mixed results in ensuring compliance with these agreements once a building opens. Without the ability to enforce site plan agreements, we will not have adequate polling places along the development corridors to serve voters residing there.

Early Voting Locations

The dramatic increase in the number of in person absentee voters has created a need for new sites to accommodate those voters. In addition to permitting in person absentee voting at the central election office throughout the 45 days before election day, we have maintained satellite voting locations at the Madison Community Center and the Walter Reed Community Center. During the 2024 Presidential election, we also operated an early voting site at the Long Bridge Aquatics and Fitness Center. Continued County growth is likely to require expansion of early voting locations in the coming decades. During the 2024 Presidential election, existing locations were able to meet demand, but lengthy voter lines sporadically developed on the first and last days of early voting at several locations.

Finding satellite locations that are easily accessible to voters is important. While we concluded that an extra satellite facility was warranted during the 2024 Presidential Election to handle the large voter turnout, Long Bridge turned out not to be an ideal location, due to citizens' unfamiliarity with the facility and its out-of-the-way location. It ended up serving fewer voters than expected. But finding ideal sites has proven to be challenging, particularly because county-owned property is often dedicated to other uses and is thus unavailable for the multi-week period necessary for operation of an early voting site. For example, the Madison satellite location has experienced difficulties because the largest room at that facility is unavailable except on election day. Early voting is relegated to a room insufficient for the number of voters it handles.

The likely expansion of early voting locations will add considerable stress to the current election infrastructure. Early voting locations are labor-intensive and require procurement of additional election equipment capable of on-demand printing of ballots unique to each of the County's precincts.



Election Officers, Ballots, and Equipment

Increases in the number of precincts will require the recruitment, training, and deployment of more pollworkers. Each precinct needs 5 to 12 workers, depending on the type of election. Recruitment and retention need to be maintained. Virginia's adoption of a same-day registration requirement has necessitated the hiring of specially trained pollworkers capable of managing the same-day registration process. Completion of that process can be quite time-consuming for each new voter, thereby requiring the hiring of additional pollworkers to ensure that the line of voters waiting to complete the process does not create congestion throughout the polling place. During the 2024 Presidential election, 4,416 Arlingtonians cast ballots after engaging in the same-day registration process. We expect that number to increase as the County's population grows. Adding more poll workers means an increased burden on permanent staff to manage these processes.

Virginia law requires that each polling location have both a ballot scanner and an ADA compliant ballot marking machine. We also equip each precinct with two to four electronic pollbooks. As we add precincts and early voting locations, we will need to purchase additional equipment.

As our population and the number of voters increase, the number of ballots that must be printed also increases. Currently, we contract for the printing of absentee mail ballots and election-day ballots by an outside vendor. If machinery for on-demand ballot printing improves, we may consider procuring such equipment for use on election day—thereby eliminating excess ballots by ensuring that election-day ballots are printed only as needed.

Outreach and Voter Education Challenges

Legal and Ethical Limitations

Legal, but more importantly ethical, considerations limit what and how the Office and the Board can do alone in outreach. The Board and Office are expected to be, and seek to be, nonpartisan in carrying on its functions, which we carry into outreach efforts. This means that avenues for outreach or targeted communication that might appear to favor one party or another, or even one candidate or another (for example in primaries) raise questions as to priority. This makes outreach more challenging.

Changing Rules and Systems

The introduction of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) has been an example of how changes to how the election system operates require intense effort to ensure that these changes do not lead to voting impediments or increased error rates that lead to votes not being counted. With new voting systems set to be introduced and legal changes possible in the coming years (e.g., the possibility that the state might allow localities to implement election day “vote centers” that would co-locate multiple precincts in a single place or shift election cycles to place statewide and General Assembly elections in even-numbered years), making sure voters understand how to cast valid votes is critical.

Informational Accuracy

Social media and other changes to the communication and technological environment have been both boon and bane in the world of elections. While they improve the ability of election administrators to communicate with the public, they also make it possible for inaccuracies and rumors to gain wide purchase. The Office and the Board face considerable challenges in ensuring that voters have accurate information about the laws and processes that apply in Arlington. This is not a matter of bad intent – in a system where each state and locality can have significant differences in equipment, policies, and practices, it is not uncommon for someone to think that something happening in one place (even a neighboring county in Virginia let alone another state) is also happening here even when that is not the case.

GOALS

Given these challenges, our office has adopted the following goals:

1. **Outreach and Voter Education**
2. **Addressing Challenges Associated with Population Growth**
3. **Meeting Facility Needs**
4. **Election Security and Infrastructure**

Goal 1: Outreach and Voter Education

Strategy	Desired Outcomes	Timeframe
1. Broaden Reach	- Improve awareness about capabilities and availability of staff (e.g., capacity to run trainings or informational sessions for outside groups).	2026
	- Increase the reach of official communication channels maintained by the Office and the Board (e.g., social media, websites, events).	2026-2027
	- Develop a robust network of local neighborhood, civic and religious groups that can assist in amplifying information and messages about elections.	2028
2. Ensure Accurate and Complete Information	- Be more proactive at the Board level in communicating with the public on emerging issues through media such as YouTube videos, Instagram reels, online “AMA” type Q&A sessions, etc.	2026-2027
	- Create an evolving library of informational and instructional resources made available to outside groups and organizations for use within their own programming.	2028
	- Become a “trusted resource” and subject-matter experts for information for local citizens and policymakers, other Virginia election administrators, and the public at large regarding election law and process.	2030

Goal 2: Addressing Challenges Associated with Population Growth

Strategy	Outcomes	Timeframe
1. Create new precincts as needed to prevent congestion and lengthy wait times	- Closely monitor voter wait times, particularly at precincts with more than 4,000 active registered voters	2025-2032
2. Eliminate polling place congestion potentially created by increase numbers of same-day registrations	- Increase training for Registration Clerks and work with Precinct Chiefs to develop strategies for ensuring that lines of those waiting to complete a same-day registration do not create congestion throughout precinct.	2026
3. Locate new satellite locations for in person absentee voting	- For the 2028 Presidential election, find an alternative to Long Branch that is more accessible to voters	2028

Goal 3: Meeting Facility Needs

Strategy	Outcomes	Timeframe
1. County Site Plan Agreements: Continue to work with the county to ensure that site plan agreements include sites for polling places. Arlington County is bound by its boundary lines, but our population will continue to grow.	- A site plan agreement will help when the time comes to open a new precinct. By code, a precinct has a minimum and maximum number of voters. Once the maximum is reached, a new precinct will need to be in place.	2026 - 2030
2. Census 2030: Census 2030 provides an opportunity to redraw precincts. The Office of Voter Registration & Elections is happy to assist although the ultimate responsibility is with the County Board.	- Redrawing boundary lines will also allow further analysis on whether new polling places are necessary and how soon they are necessary.	2030

Goal 4: Election Security and Infrastructure

Strategy	Outcomes	Timeframe
1. Enhance & Document Business Continuity		2026
2. Enhance Security & Infrastructure		2028

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

The following priorities have been identified for the next four years.

Year	Priority
2025	Adopt Strategic Plan
2026	Implement new voting system
2027	
2028	Presidential Election

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