Arlington Electoral Board Strategic Plan

Mission Statement

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

Over the next 20 years the Arlington Electoral Board anticipates the following challenges: increases in population, shifts in voting trends, facility strains, and labor force changes and demands.

1. Growth of County

Population

Since 2010 Arlington's population has grown by more than 36,000 residents and 46,000 voters[1]. Growth is expected to continue. We expect to add another 37,000 voters by 2040.

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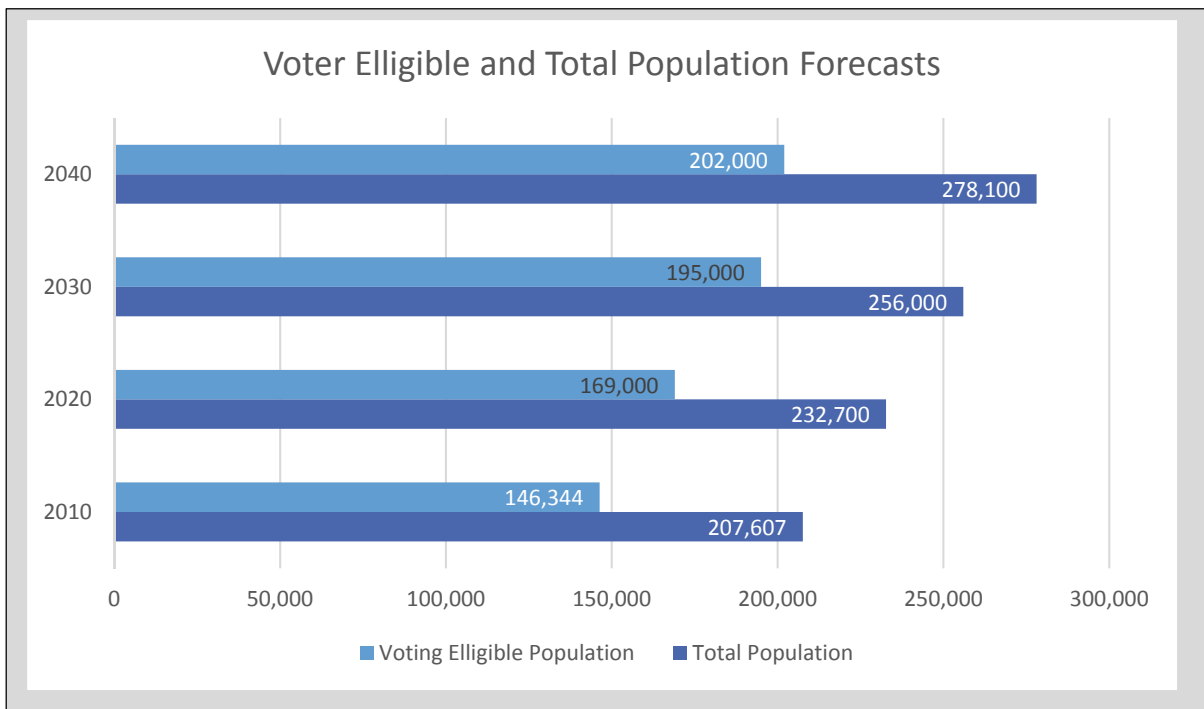
Polling places

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

---

[1] This figure includes active and inactive voters.

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.

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 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 these voters.

Election Officers

As we increase the number of precincts, we need to recruit, train, and deploy more pollworkers. Each precinct needs five to twelve workers, depending on the type of election. Recruitment and retention need to be maintained. Adding more pollworkers means an increased burden on permanent staff to manage these processes.

Ballots, Voting Machines, and other Materials

As our population increases, we increase the number of ballots needed. Annually, this averages out to a 2% increase [2], and the budget line item for ballot printing will increase accordingly.

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

We anticipate the life span of our current voting machines, purchased in 2015, to be approximately 10 years. Our current pollbooks, purchased in 2008, are now at the end of their expected life cycle and need replacement sooner.

## 2. Shifts in Voting Trends: Election Season, Not Just Election Day

Over the past 20 years, voting behavior has shifted. Instead of voting on Election Day, more voters are choosing to cast their ballots before Election Day, either by mail or in person absentee.[3]

We have seen a steady increase in both by mail and in person absentee voters. The percentage of voters who choose to vote before Election Day is heavily dependent on the type of election. During the 2015 General Election, only 1.5% or 2,343 voters chose to vote before Election Day. The following year, 22% or 38,029 voted before Election Day.

To accommodate the dramatic increase in pre-Election Day voting during Presidential elections, our office added two satellite voting locations in 2012 and 2016. Operating satellite locations are costly, as they require more personnel and equipment. Placement of locations must be done carefully, as they can be viewed a politically motivated. Given the erratic, but clear upward trajectory of pre-Election Day voting, the office must carefully consider when to offer satellite voting sites for each November Election.

---

[2] If we add 40,000 voters over the next 20 years = 2% increase
[3] https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/2016_EAVS_Comprehensive_Report.pdf

Absentee Voting Numbers
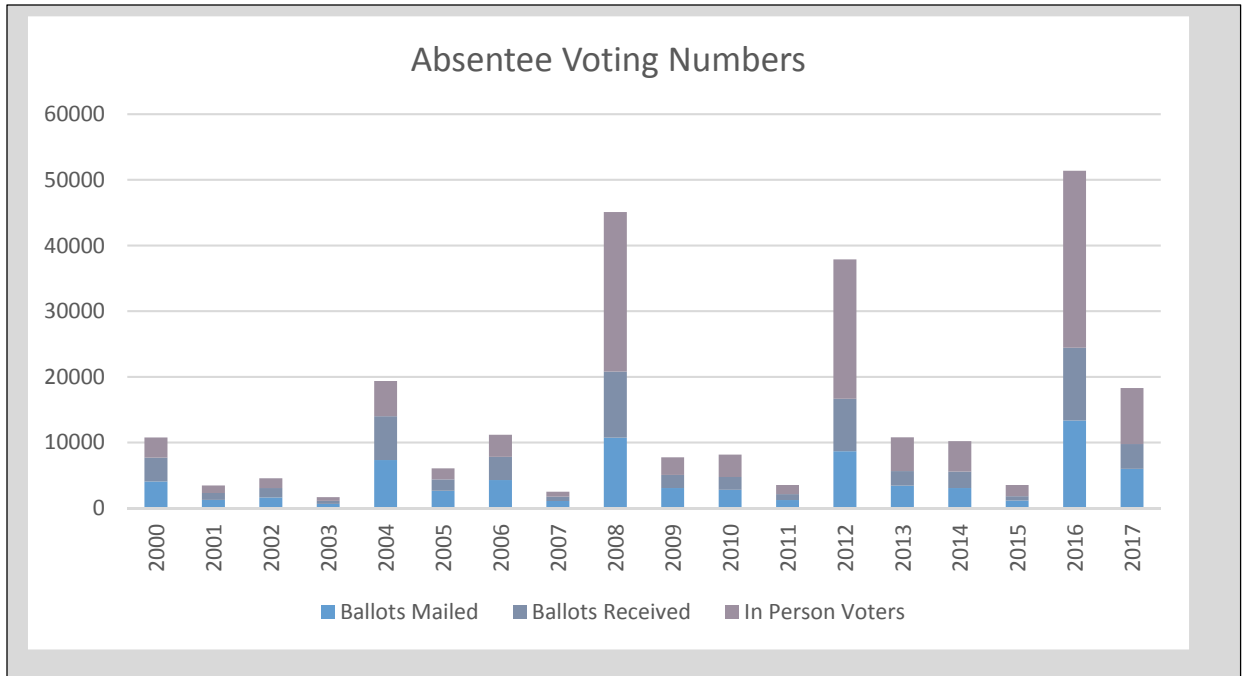
As voting trends move to a season rather than a day, there are also security concerns since we are now storing counted ballots for a significant period before each election. Increased ballot storage and security is a critical priority.

3. Facilities

The increasing population and shifts in voting behavior change the workflow of elections. Currently our office is split across several work areas at the Bozman Government Center (BGC) and our warehouse at Woodmont Center. Ideally, our entire workspace should be in a centralized location that would provide office space, storage, and warehouse space, as well as adequate and easily accessible space and parking for absentee voting.

Bozman Government Center

Within BGC, we are split into three work areas. Our main operations are based out of Suite 320. During election time we often use the shared meeting spaces in the lobby and on the third floor. Since we do not have adequate storage in our suite, we also have a storage area on the 9th floor.

The renovation of BGC presents an opportunity to reconfigure and streamline our space. The current issues are (1) lack of an adequate and accessible in person voting room witin our suite, (2) lack of storage, and (3) security.

In person absentee voting currently takes place in Room 317, a small room that cannot hold more than four voters at a time and no longer is adequate to efficiently process the volume of voters during the last week of absentee voting during general elections. It is also impossible for a voter in wheelchair to adequately maintain privacy when casting a ballot. The current configuration is also not secure. Voters have access to an area where ballots are stored.

Because we are located on the third floor of the building, voters must access our office via stairs or elevators. The travel distance from the elevators to our office is sometimes difficult for voters with accessible needs to easily manage. Parking, especially accessible parking, is an issue for voters at BGC.

We will likely lose our storage space on the 9th floor during the renovation and have no comparable space in our current footprint.

Arlington switched to paper ballots in 2015 and our office does not have adequate storage and security to accommodate the volume of ballots used. Paper ballots require a large footprint and secure storage. There is no such space designed for this in our current configuration, which was established when we used electronic voting equipment.

Woodmont Center

Voting equipment is stored on the lower level of the Woodmont Center, a former elementary school. The continued deterioration of the facility has led to numerous issues over the years. Early this year, the County began a renovation project in rooms adjacent to ours to accommodate Library archives, but no improvements to our space were included in this project. Ongoing issues include:

Humidity and HVAC: While humidity upgrades were addressed and added for the Library space, no updates were included for our area. When we purchased our current equipment in 2015, we raised the issue of humidity control with Facilities staff, concerned that lack of proper humidity controls would compromise pre-election ballot storage. The HVAC system in our area is so noisy that staff must request it be turned off when they are present because it prevents conversation.

Unhealthy work environment: Asbestos abatement efforts in the ceilings has been addressed, but abatement material flakes off and falls onto our equipment, along with other ceiling debris. Unlike the renovated Libraries area, where ceiling tiles have been removed and the ceiling area cleaned, our area continues to be a combination of crumbling ceiling tiles and open ceiling areas.

Water and sewage leaks from the floor above have also caused mold and damage on some walls and ceiling areas. Some sections of our area cannot be used for storage for fear of leaks. Renovations on walls adjacent to ours has resulted in the need for additional repairs.

The open concrete floor is dusty, and, unlike the renovated space, is not sealed. We have concerns about the effects of dust on our equipment. Staff often see rodents, insects, and reptiles in the space.

Accessibility: The restroom facilities available for staff and visitors are relics from the elementary school days, with non-ADA accessible child-size fixtures. There is no hot water in our area. The floors contain raised fixtures that are tripping hazards.

Communications: There is no WIFI and very poor cellular service in our work area. While we have a landline phone, staff working at the facility are concerned that if an incident requiring emergency services occurs, they may be unable to reach the phone in a timely manner.

Security: Security cameras are strongly recommended for voting equipment storage and ballot storage, but we have none, either at Woodmont or in the absentee area. While the lower level does have a security alarm, we are concerned that, with increased traffic on that level by Library staff and visitors, diligent activation of the alarmed door may slack off, which may compromise access to our area.

Training Facilities and Polling Places

An additional facility challenge is a lack of adequate training space for Election Officers. We currently use rooms at Central Library, Park Operations, and Fairlington Community Center. Our office trains officers on equipment that must be transported and stored at each of these three locations. Security of the supplies cannot be guaranteed. We also have to compete with community and County programs for scheduling, which is less than ideal. Preferable would be a central location that both has ample parking and is accessible via public transportation where we could set up just once to train Election Officers.

As mentioned before, there is a lack of new County properties planned areas where the population is expected to grow. This makes it more difficult to find polling places for voters in high density areas.

4. Labor Force Characteristics

Our office employs seven permanent staff or 6.6 FTEs, plus between eight and 60 temporary employees depending on election, for an additional 1.8 FTEs. Our last FTE increase was in 2005, and we have had little permanent staff growth in the past 20 years, despite County growth and workflow increases. Temporary employees give our office the flexibility to manage the variable workload throughout the year. Despite this, given the projected population and workload increases, our office needs to steadily add FTEs as the County grows. There is currently not a mechanism in place to accommodate this increase during the budget process.

In addition, five of the seven permanent staff are or will be eligible for retirement in the next few years. This will result in a loss of institutional knowledge.

Goals

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

(1) Voter as Customer
(2) Security Enhancements
(3) Transparency

Goal 1: Voter as Customer

The first line of business for our office is to serve Arlington's voters. As we think about ways to improve the experience of voter's interaction with our office, we have identified the following strategies.

Strategy	Desired Outcomes	Timeframe
1. Absentee Satellite Locations	- Add Satellite voting for each General Election	- 2020
2. Election Officer Recruitment, Retention, Training	- Conduct election debrief with Chief Election Officers to identify areas for training - Explore online training options as supplement to in person training	- 2017 - 2018/2019
3. Accessibility	- Explore options for making In Person absentee voting space more accessible for voters with limited mobility and/or identify alternate location - Survey Polling Places for ADA compliance (Last done in 2003)	- 2019 - 2019

Strategy	Outcomes	Timeframe
4. **Polling Places**	- Assess Polling Place capacity for 2020 Presidential Election. Make changes by Feb 2019 (COV prohibition).	- 2018
5. **Election Volunteers**	- Actively recruit high school students and adult volunteers for Election Day assistance at the polls	- 2018

Goal 2: Security

Following security concerns raised during the 2016 Presidential Election, our office needs to reassess where we are on security concerns with the following strategies.

Strategy	Outcomes	Timeframe
1. **Training**	- Review security reports issued by federal and state agencies - Train staff how to spot security vulnerabilities (email/phone phishing) - Train Election Officers on their role in the process	- 2018 - 2018 - 2018
2. **Evaluate Systems**	- Meet with DHS for security audit	- 2018
3. **Facility**	- Raise awareness with County management on facility concerns with Strategic Plan and tours. - Add ballot cages to absentee office - Add security cameras to all facilities where ballots are stored	- 2018 - 2018 - 2019

Goal 3: Transparency

As our office increases security, we also much remain open and transparent. The following strategies will help achieve this goal.

Strategy	Outcomes	Timeframe
1. **Outreach**	- Reassess Outreach Goals and Plan - Increase events throughout Arlington as appropriate by Plan (fairs, high schools, etc.) - 'I Voted' Sticker Contest - Facebook Live Campaign	- 2018 - 2019 - 2019 - 2018/9
2. **Publish Datasets**	- Publish datasets on County Open Data platform	- 2018

The Next Four Years

The following priorities have been assigned to the next four years.

2018	Security, Public Datasets, Online Election Officer Training/newsletter, Increase Awareness about Facility Challenges
2019	Sticker Campaign, Replace Pollbooks, BGC Renovations, Polling Place Accessibility
2020	Presidential Election
2021	Redistricting – Polling Place Management

Beyond the Next 4 Years

Presidential Elections shake up the election landscape in America. As such, this Plan should be reevaluated at minimum every four years to make sure it incorporates new developments and trends. With that in mind, population growth resulting in workload and polling places needs will continue to be our office's greatest challenge.