

Ellen Bozman:
A Lifetime of Service,
A Legacy of Leadership
in Arlington County

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In 1925, the president of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, declared that “What we need is not more federal government, but better local government.”¹ Though Ellen Bozman, who was born in that very same year, would grow up with very different social and political beliefs than those reflected in Coolidge’s conservative, small-government views, her work can be seen as a study in the melioration of local government. In fact, Bozman was a critical force in turning Arlington into the diverse, prosperous, and livable place that it is today.

Ellen Bozman, who holds the honor of being the longest-serving Arlington County Board member, was a community activist in Arlington for more than four decades. Though she was born and raised in Illinois, she moved to the Arlington area after graduating from Northwestern University with a degree in Political Science.² Her first job in the area, working for the U.S. Bureau of the Budget, provided her with an entrée into government service.³ In the early 1950s, Bozman became active in Arlington’s political and civic life. She was elected to the county board in 1974,⁴ where she became a key player in the development of the County’s people-centered approach to development. Even after her retirement from the board in 1997, she remained a prominent figure in the County until her death in 2009.⁵



Fig. 1. Ellen Bozman and the other members of the Arlington County Board posing for a photo at her first meeting [1974]. From Arlington Public Library Archives.
<https://libraryarchives.arlingtonva.us/Detail/objects/3363>.

¹ “Quotations - F”

² Wiseman, “Ellen M. Bozman; Arlington Activist”

³ “Ellen Bozman: Longest Serving County Board Member”

⁴ “County Board Members, 1932-present”

⁵ Wiseman, “Ellen M. Bozman; Arlington Activist”

Just a few years before Ellen Bozman moved to the area in 1946, Arlington had demonstrated a problematic approach to development and urbanization. East Arlington, which was also known as Queen City, was a thriving community of people who took pride in their neighborhood. A former resident reflected on how “[the neighbors] all knew each other, played together, walked to school together...”. There were many local businesses in the area, and most of the houses were built by neighborhood builders. When the construction for the Pentagon began, residents were unaware of any impact that this project would have upon them since the building itself didn't encompass any of the neighborhood. They figured that they were fine, having never been warned to the contrary. They were not fine, though. The Pentagon's massive capacity also required an enormous parking lot, which led authorities to demolish the entire neighborhood. This choice proved to be extremely damaging for everyone living in the community -- not only were they given only 30 days' notice to move, but were compensated poorly for their homes, for which they were given around \$2,000 each,⁶ while the average price of a house in the United States at the time was more than \$3,700.⁷

For the more than 200 families living there, finding new housing was nearly impossible, and Arlington only offered them temporary housing in trailers. Not only was it very hard on each family living there, but the community suffered as a whole. One former resident of the neighborhood later recalled, “Some of those people, you never did see them again. ...They never came back to this area. When East Arlington got leveled, that really broke that community up.” Another put it this way: “We lost our community; we lost our homes; we lost our work. What was lost will never be replaced.”⁸

⁶ Hollmuller, “Right Out Our Front Door”

⁷ Landphair, “Remembering 1942”

⁸ Hollmuller, “Right Out Our Front Door”



Fig. 2. A small business in East Arlington before the destruction of the neighborhood.
 From Arlington Public Library.
<https://library.arlingtonva.us/2018/01/31/from-freedmans-village-to-queen-city-one-communities-evolution/>.

Though Ellen Bozman entered Arlington Government far too late to change the outcome of this story, she held ideas of development that were diametrically opposed to the ones that guided the Pentagon project. Her devotion to keeping communities together and to improving access to jobs, transportation, and housing (especially low-income housing) drove Arlington, under her leadership, to adopt a much different approach when the Metro, another massive public works project, came to town.

In her work on the County Board, Ellen Bozman worked tirelessly to implement affordable housing in Arlington. Since she had moved to Arlington, she had seen housing prices steadily rise, putting the County increasingly out of reach for lower- and middle-income workers. She advocated for affordable housing solutions in Arlington, which at the time were not common in Northern Virginia. After she retired from the county board in 1997, she co-founded the Alliance for Housing Solutions,⁹ a non-profit group based in Arlington that to this day continues to work to increase the number of affordable housing options in Northern Virginia. The Alliance for Housing Solutions now recognizes someone each year who has made great strides in the quality and number of affordable housing options with the Ellen Bozman Affordable Housing Award.¹⁰

Bozman also wanted to keep a sense of community among Arlington neighborhoods and all Arlingtonians. She started Neighborhood Day,¹¹ which is a “beloved Arlington tradition [that] brings communities together to enjoy the great outdoors (or indoors) and strengthens ties between neighbors.”¹² She also started the first farmer’s market in Arlington, which is still held every

⁹ “Ellen Bozman: Longest Serving County Board Member”

¹⁰ “Ellen M. Bozman Affordable Housing Award”

¹¹ Wiseman, “Ellen M. Bozman; Arlington Activist”

¹² “Neighborhood Day”

Saturday near the Arlington Courthouse.¹³ Traditions like these have helped make Arlington into a place that celebrates community even at the neighborhood level.

Bozman also sponsored infrastructure that supported these neighborhood ties. In her campaign for reelection to the County Board in 1977, she released a progress report on the initiatives she had started and the causes she had supported. Among them was the creation of recreation centers at Hoffman-Boston and Gunston and of the Aurora Hills Complex, which included a library, a recreational center, and a fire station.¹⁴

Before her time on the County Board, Bozman served on the County Planning Commission, where she advocated for retirement centers in Arlington.¹⁵ She collaborated with others to found the first low-income retirement community in Arlington, called Culpepper Garden,¹⁶ which opened after years of planning in 1975.¹⁷ In her first few years on the Board, Bozman continued to push for the creation of affordable retirement homes. The Health Care Commission, which she established in 1976 and chaired from the beginning, helped create another retirement facility, this one in Cherrydale, and a hospice for the terminally ill.¹⁸ These facilities allowed Arlington residents to access excellent and affordable care right in their community.

One of Bozman's largest and most important programs was her "Smart Growth" initiative. Through this initiative, she successfully distinguished urban from suburban areas in Arlington.¹⁹ The "Smart Growth" approach differentiated between retail areas and neighborhood areas, allowing for quieter neighborhoods still near to public transportation, restaurants, and shops. These urban amenities are concentrated around Metro stations. Her approach also helped preserve parks, playgrounds, and trails in Arlington,²⁰ which now together total more than 150.²¹ The revised land-use plans that she steered toward passage increased the number of housing options that were within walking distance of the Metro.²² Though the original "Smart Growth" plan was for the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor, it has since been implemented all around the County and has been called a "shining example" for counties all around the country that are trying to implement similar strategies.²³

¹³ "Arlington Farmers Market"

¹⁴ "Ellen Bozman and... Orderly and Pleasing Growth"

¹⁵ "Ellen Bozman: Longest Serving County Board Member"

¹⁶ "Ellen Bozman and... Orderly and Pleasing Growth"

¹⁷ "History & Awards"

¹⁸ Bozman, "Bozman Letter to Senior Citizens"

¹⁹ "The Best Kind of Activist"

²⁰ "Ellen Bozman: Longest Serving County Board Member"

²¹ "Find a Park"

²² "Ellen Bozman and... Orderly and Pleasing Growth"

²³ Davis, "Arlington, Virginia's story"



Fig. 3. Ellen Bozman as a County Board member, 1970s. From Arlington Public Library Archives.
<https://libraryarchives.arlingtonva.us/Detail/objects/3366>.

In addition to fostering livability in Arlington, Ellen Bozman helped to transform the County into a place where people of all backgrounds could pursue work that helped them reach their economic and career goals.

Ellen Bozman's "Smart Growth" program made it easy for residents to travel from their home to their workplace by keeping neighborhoods within walking distance of the Metro and bus stops, while still maintaining defined and welcoming neighborhoods. Today, more than 20 percent of Arlingtonians use public transport to get to work,²⁴ which is a testament to her visionary urban design. Comparatively, only 5.1 percent of the population nationwide does the same.²⁵ Alongside the environmental and traffic management benefits of the wide usage of public transportation in Arlington, there are countless economic benefits for the County, including increasing growth sustainably and allowing a socioeconomically diverse range of people to access high-quality jobs in the region.²⁶ Ellen Bozman's work to improve access to public transportation that is well integrated into the community has allowed Arlington to be a place where workers and businesses thrive and diversity flourishes.

Before Bozman was elected to the County Board, she spent her time helping to foster the diversity in Arlington's workforce that she knew would greatly improve the County. From 1967-1969, Bozman was the chairwoman of the Health and Welfare Council, an organization that supported Arlingtonians in need. To investigate families' struggles, she ran a study of school-aged

²⁴ "Commute Mode Share"

²⁵ Fox, "Who Takes the Bus or Train?"

²⁶ "Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment"

children with parents who worked full-time.²⁷ With the study's conclusions in hand, she led the initiative to provide after-school programs for these kids. These programs, which are now widely offered in Arlington, were pathbreaking in allowing parents to work the hours necessary for their jobs without sacrificing the safety and well-being of their children. Another way that Ellen Bozman helped people who were working in Arlington was through her initiative to change the hiring policies of Arlington County to be more inclusive and non-discriminatory.²⁸

Bozman also nurtured the development and maintenance of small businesses in Arlington through initiatives she started, such as the Commercial Conservation Program. Under the program, small businesses were chosen by the Economic Development Commission (also started in part by Bozman); the Commission worked to improve the area around the businesses, rendering them more accessible and attractive to potential customers.



Fig. 4. A bumper sticker publicizing Ellen Bozman's campaign for the Arlington County Board [1977]. From Arlington Public Library Archives. <https://libraryarchives.arlingtonva.us/Detail/objects/3362>.

Ellen Bozman's vision of Arlington County as a diverse, inclusive place to live and work has become a legacy that we can see up to the present in the work of the current Arlington County Board. Katie Cristol, a current board member and a former chairwoman of the Board, ran for reelection in 2019 on a platform that included and expanded upon many of Bozman's signature policies. One of Cristol's plans, for instance, focused on access to child-care in Arlington, which, as stated, was one of Bozman's key policies.²⁹ Another of Cristol's plans focused on affordable housing, another of Bozman's priorities, as discussed above. Cristol also helped secure a reliable, permanent, and steady stream of funding for the Metro³⁰ from Virginia, Maryland, and DC in 2018,³¹ an accomplishment that builds upon the important work Bozman did to improve the implementation of the Metro in Arlington.³²

Ellen Bozman also left an important legacy of female leadership to the County Board. Before her election, the Board had lacked women since the departure of Leone B. Buchholz in 1958. Since Bozman was elected to the board, though, there has not been a single year in which a woman has not held a seat. Two of the five current members are women.³³

Given Ellen Bozman's dedication to good government in Arlington, it seems fitting that the offices of the County Board are housed in a building named after her. The Ellen M. Bozman Government Center is also home to the Office of Voter Registration, the Department of Community Planning, Housing & Development, and a public library branch, along with many

²⁷ "Arlington County Office Building"

²⁸ "Ellen Bozman: Longest Serving County Board Member"

²⁹ Cristol, "Why You Should Vote for Me"

³⁰ Cristol, "Why You Should Vote for Me"

³¹ McCartney, "Metro gets third and final 'yes'"

³² "The Best Kind of Activist"

³³ "County Board Members, 1932-present"

other offices that serve the public. While the Ellen M. Bozman Government Center encompasses these different offices, the woman behind the name still guides them.³⁴

³⁴ "Government Center"

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