

Editor's Note: Each year, the Arlington Historical Society, in partnership with the Cherrydale-Columbia Masonic Lodge, sponsors an essay contest for Arlington students in grades 8-12. This year, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the naming of Arlington County, we asked students to write about a person or group who has made a significant contribution to Arlington over the last 100 years. The Arlington Historical Society is proud to publish the winning essay.

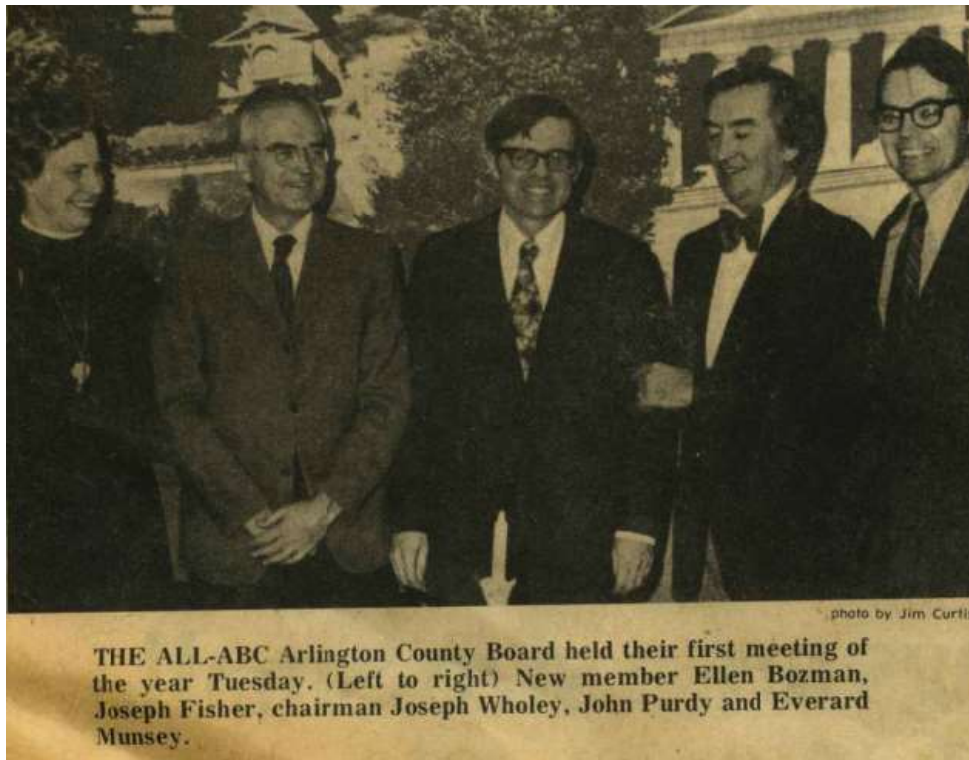
Ellen Bozman

A Lifetime of Service, A Legacy of Leadership in Arlington County

By Julia Brodsky, HB Woodlawn

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 amelioration 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 US 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, where she became a key player in the development of the county’s people-centered approach to development (Fig. 1). Even after her retirement from the board in 1997, she remained a prominent



Courtesy of Arlington Public Library, Center for Local History

Fig. 1: Ellen Bozman and the other members of the Arlington County Board posing for a photo at her first meeting [1974].

figure in the county until her death in 2009.⁴

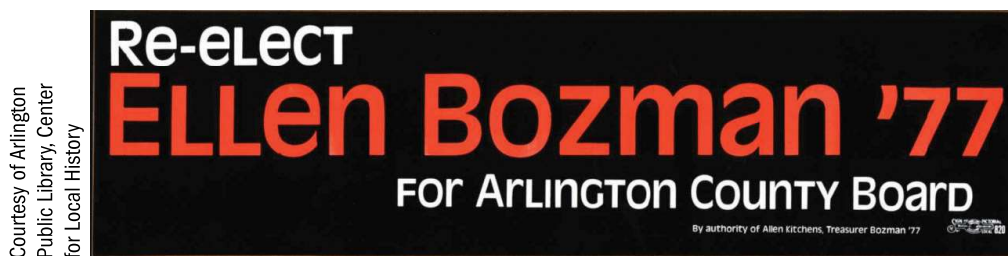
Just a few years before Ellen Bozman moved to the area in 1946, Arlington had demonstrated a problematic approach to development and urbanization. East Arlington, which was also known as Queen City, was a thriving community of people who took pride in their neighborhood. A former resident reflected on 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 had 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.⁵

For the more than 200 families living there, finding new housing was nearly impossible, and Arlington only offered them temporary housing in trailers. The families and community suffered greatly. 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.”⁶

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, which at the time were not common in Northern Virginia. After Bozman retired from the County Board in 1997, she co-founded the Alliance for Housing Solutions, 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.⁷

Fig. 2: A bumper sticker publicizing Ellen Bozman's campaign for the Arlington County Board [1977].



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for Local History

Bozman also wanted to keep a sense of community among residents and Arlington neighborhoods. She started Neighborhood Day, which is a “beloved Arlington tradition [that] brings communities together to enjoy the great outdoors (or indoors) and strengthens ties between neighbors.”⁸ She also started the first farmer’s market in Arlington, which is still held every Saturday near the Arlington Courthouse.⁹ Traditions like these have helped make Arlington into a place that celebrates community even at the neighborhood level.

Bozman 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 (Fig. 2). 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.¹⁰

Before her time on the County Board, Bozman served on the County Planning Commission, where she advocated for retirement centers in Arlington.¹¹ She collaborated with others to establish the first low-income retirement community in Arlington, called Culpepper Garden, which opened in 1975 after years of planning.¹² In her first few years on the Board, Bozman continued to push for the creation of affordable retirement solutions. 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. 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.¹³ The “Smart Growth” approach differentiated between retail and neighborhood areas, allowing for quieter neighborhoods still near to public transportation, restaurants, and shops. These urban amenities were concentrated around Metro stations. Her approach also helped preserve parks, playgrounds, and trails in Arlington, which currently total more than 150.¹⁴ The revised land-use plans that she steered toward passage increased the number of housing options that were within walking distance of the Metro.¹⁵ Though the original “Smart Growth” plan was for the Rosslyn-



Fig. 3: Ellen Bozman as a County Board member, 1970s.

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 (Fig. 3).

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. 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 their defined and welcoming nature. Today, more than 20 percent of Arlingtonians use public transport to get to work compared to 5.1 percent nationwide.¹⁶ Alongside the environmental and traffic management benefits of the wide usage of public transportation, there are countless economic benefits, including sustainable growth and access to quality jobs for those at all socioeconomical levels. Bozman’s work to improve community integrated public transportation has allowed Arlington to be a place where workers and businesses thrive and diversity flourishes.

Before Bozman was elected to the County Board, she sought to improve Arlington through workforce diversity. 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 children with parents who worked full-time.¹⁷ 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 path-breaking 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 workers was through her initiative to change the hiring policies of Arlington County to be more inclusive and non-discriminatory.¹⁸

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, the area surrounding chosen small businesses was improved, making them more attractive and accessible to potential customers.¹⁹

Ellen Bozman's vision of Arlington County as a diverse, inclusive place to live and work has become a legacy that we can see on the current Arlington County Board. Katie Cristol, a board member and former chairwoman, ran for reelection in 2019 on a platform that included and expanded upon many of Bozman's signature policies.²⁰ For instance, Cristol focused on child-care and affordable housing, key Bozman initiatives. Cristol also helped secure a reliable, permanent, and steady stream of funding for the Metro from Virginia, Maryland, and DC in 2018, an accomplishment that builds upon the important work Bozman did to improve the implementation of the Metro in Arlington.²¹

Ellen Bozman left an important legacy of female leadership on the County Board. Before her election, Leone B. Buchholz in 1958 had been the last woman on the board. Women have held seats every year since Bozman was elected. Two of the five current members are women.²²

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 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.²³

About the Author

Julia Brodsky is a 10th grade student at HB Woodlawn High School.

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