



**Park and Recreation Commission**  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 414  
Arlington, Virginia 22201



March 14, 2022

Honorable Katie Cristol  
Chair, Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: FY 2023 Budget Proposal

Dear Chairperson Cristol,

The Park and Recreation Commission has reviewed summaries of the Manager's proposed budget for FY 2023 and would like to provide the following comments.

As first noted in our March 16, 2021 letter, we applaud the extensive and innovative adjustments made in the design and delivery of DPR programs during the past two years. We especially recognize the efforts of DPR employees, whose ongoing efforts to provide a wide range of safe programs to residents have been outstanding during these challenging and changing circumstances. We fully support the proposed staff pay adjustments included in the budget. We believe that these adjustments are both well-deserved and a necessary means of helping employees keep pace with recent inflationary trends.

The PRC supports all of the funding and staffing enhancements contained in the proposed budget. The conversion of temporary position funding to permanent positions for preschool and youth services, the two positions for Lubber Run Community Center facility staffing, and the two new positions and additional funding for the field maintenance team are all important. In addition, we are pleased to learn of the proposed new civil engineer position to provide special expertise to the Park Design and Development function as well as Forestry and Natural Resources. Finally, PRC is glad to see the conversion of gasoline-powered to battery-powered electric hand tools used for park maintenance.

Concerning a few program areas, the Park and Recreation Commission believe that the FY 2023 proposal does not adequately support current priorities. We recommend that additional resources be applied to the following:

1. Mitigation of invasive species threats. Funding for this program has been steady at \$100K for a decade, which has been an important investment, but translates to a gradual reduction of over 20% when adjusted for inflation. To be most effective, the program requires funding adjustments to offset inflation, as well as enhancements to support the inclusion of additional

acreage into the rolling 10-year strategy while maintaining a reduced regimen in treated areas for a few years to counter recidivism. Increased resourcing would help create a strong push for a new baseline in our invasive plant program that would be sustained through annual maintenance. We recommend that the FY 2023 budget contain a correction for inflation of \$27K as well as an increase of \$40K to support accelerated and expanded coverage into the parks not yet part of the program.

2. Tree canopy survey. PRC believes that managing without valid and timely information about Arlington's tree canopy status limits the potential for cost-effective actions, and places program managers in a compromised position to set operational priorities. One of the central concerns regarding Arlington's physical space is the amount of tree canopy at a neighborhood level, including current trends for that coverage, given the rate of change we are experiencing from storms, natural attrition, and impact resulting from development. The current Missing Middle Housing Study is an important initiative for the county, but that project cannot be completed with full confidence unless we establish a current baseline on our county-wide tree canopy. While many data needs exist to inform the management of all of our natural resources, the ecological center is the tree canopy. PRC recommends funding a survey to be conducted in this fiscal year.
3. Conservation and Interpretation staff increase. Today the level of public interest and concern about our parks and natural spaces, our urban ecology, and our biodiversity is very strong and increasing. This is in part a result of climate change and the significant uptick in the use of our outdoor spaces during Covid-19. It is also supported by the Public Spaces Master Plan, the Biophilic Cities Resolution, and the Equity Resolution—all adopted in 2019, the last full year before the pandemic. A very large portion of our education and outreach effort makes up the core mission of the Conservation and Interpretation Program, to include nature center programming, historical interpretation programs, environmental education and park safety, and environmental stewardship. Nature center programs are provided at Long Branch and Gulf Branch as well as in schools, community centers, and other venues throughout the year. This in-demand program is performed with 7 FTE staff positions. Recently a new policy has been introduced that requires a minimum of two county staff to be on-site whenever a nature center is open. (The nature centers house the offices for program staff.) This is a wise policy for the public and staff. But it severely limits the delivery of very popular and important programming to the public, makes program scheduling complicated and subject to change, and inequitably impacts those whose age or capability favors visiting nature centers when they are less busy. Many nature center activities—from guided walks to supervising volunteer work efforts—are outdoors. These are value-enhancing efforts, because some generate fees and because the county reaps benefits from skilled volunteer projects. The PRC supports the minimum staffing requirement but strongly recommends that this program be provided two (2) additional FTEs to allow full use of the nature centers while also delivering the wide range of other program activities around the county.

PRC appreciates recognition in the Public Spaces Master Plan and other associated resolutions and plans that our parks and natural spaces are highly valued, highly valuable, and highly vulnerable. We support continued and enhanced investment in the viability and quality of these important natural assets.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shruti Kупpa". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Shruti Kупpa  
Chair – Park and Recreation Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board  
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager  
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation  
Fiscal Affairs Advisory Commission