



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



June 14, 2022

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

RE: Parks and Recreation Commission Comments on the County Manager's Proposed CIP

Dear Chair Cristol,

The Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) reviewed the County Manager's proposed Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) dated May 19, 2022, for the ten years from 2023 to 2032, and provides the following comments. We look forward to further discussion and we plan to update these comments as the CIP moves through the County Board approval process.

In brief, we are pleased with the County Manager's emphasis on environmental issues and resiliency but request more funding be made available for parkland acquisition, we request that a natural capital assessment be undertaken to solidify future funding requests for "natural resiliency", and we note with approval the plans to continue to fulfill previous commitments.

Parkland Acquisition. We note favorably the restoration of funding for parkland acquisition after it was zeroed in the last CIP, but we are concerned that the amount allocated is insufficient to achieve County goals. Acquisition of thirty acres of parkland is recommended by the Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) and is a priority listed prominently in the PRC 2022 Work Plan dated February 4, 2022. Moreover, Arlington citizens identified "land acquisition for parks" as a very high priority within the parks and recreation budget area through the public engagement survey. We cannot overstate how important this item is to us and other Arlington County citizens. We appreciate that approximately 11 acres of numerous small parcels were added as public spaces in 2020 and 2021 through development project negotiations. We encourage the County to continue its program of prioritizing public space acquisition in site plan negotiations. Fulfillment of the thirty acres vision in the PSMP, however, will require significantly more funding than the \$5 million that has been budgeted for the next ten years. We encourage the County to allocate additional funds for parkland acquisition.

Equity. At its May 25, 2021 meeting, PRC received a presentation on Equity in Arlington Parks from members of the Civic Federation. Part of the discussion focused on the challenges of providing natural open space in some apartment-heavy, lower-income, ethnically diverse

neighborhoods. While the acquisition and creation of large park spaces in any part of Arlington is an extreme challenge, we would point to the PSMP as identifying some park expansion possibilities in South Arlington. These include Drew, Douglas, Glen Carlyn, Maury, Rocky Run, Lang Street, and Shirlington. We are concerned that the CIP does not provide a more robust and immediate investment into making improvements to Quincy Park, the county's largest park in a densely populated neighborhood.

Natural Capital. We are also gratified that the concept of “natural capital” is in the CIP with the proposed funding for a “natural resiliency program”. The proposal indicates that the natural resiliency “work may include forest restoration, stream improvements, large scale invasives removal, implementation of biophilic principals, etc.” We certainly support all these concepts as high priorities, especially large-scale invasive plant removal that has been sorely underfunded in the operating budget at a fixed amount for over ten years, but the description is vague. We recommend that the funds proposed for “natural resiliency” be directed toward a natural capital assessment that would identify priority investments that yield the greatest benefit for their cost. “Benefit” in this case should be specifically tied to adopted County goals such the Biophilic Cities policy, greenhouse gas emission reductions stated in the CEP, or progress toward compliance with Chesapeake Bay goals, as examples. We appreciate the unstated, but apparent, recognition that our natural resources need care and capital expenditures to continue to provide the important benefits of increased property values, better health outcomes, reduced heating and cooling costs, and mitigation of climate change impacts. As the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission recommended in its May 16, 2022, letter to you, we encourage the County to undertake an inventory of its natural resources health to responsibly manage its crucial, yet increasingly rare and fragile, natural assets.

Master Plan and Trails/Bridges Funding. In general, we support the focus on working to maintain our current parks’ natural spaces and facilities while following up on previous and ongoing capital improvement commitments to the community. We are pleased to see the proposed funding for Phase II of Jennie Dean Park, as well as funding for part of the Arlington Boathouse project. We are hopeful that this project, which partners with the National Park Service (NPS), will present the opportunity to further this partnership to remove invasive plants that are destroying the trees and natural capital of the Arlington Potomac shoreline owned by NPS but affecting the quality of life of Arlingtonians. We are pleased with the emphasis on funding PSMP priorities especially three urban parks and three parks in Crystal City as well as many others, some already mentioned. The trails and bridges program has features important to many who use park spaces and corridors for transit, recreation, and relaxation. We are pleased with the creativity associated with the “Emerging Uses Program” to make sure County investments stay in touch with the changing preferences and needs of our community.

Fields. With regard to synthetic field projects, we support, in general, the outlined replacement and conversion plan totaling around \$34 million for FY23. Our understanding is DPR’s field selection criteria encompasses, for the most part, average life span of artificial turf fields (which is provided by vendors) to identify which fields to undertake in respective CIP fiscal years. The Public Spaces Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (PSMP-IAC) has undertaken

improving data on field utilization and field density to assess future athletic field needs, among other things. As part of this work, the PSMP-IAC is working to define field utilization and field density, which will allow DPR to have a more robust framework and data when assessing artificial turf field life spans. This data can improve DPR's selection of artificial turf replacement as field density can exacerbate the life span of a turf field. Therefore, in addition to using the average life span criterion, we urge DPR to use the field utilization and field density metrics as part of their selection criteria moving forward.

Stormwater Funding. Since stormwater has become a problem of great interest to the County, and since parks can (and already do) serve to capture a significant amount of stormwater runoff, a percentage of the country's stormwater mitigation budget should be assigned to the Park and Recreation Department. Currently, none of that budget is attributed to DPR. In some of the newer parks, such as Mosaic Park, a significant amount of parkland is used for rain gardens. While this is appropriate, and often attractive, it removes acreage from other uses such as active and passive recreation. If stormwater funds are budgeted into the Parks and Recreation Department, more money could be freed up for land acquisition.

Sincerely,



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