



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



March 3, 2022

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

RE: Update of Standard Site Plan Conditions

Dear Chairperson Cristol,

Site Plan Conditions reflect the minimum standards that Arlington requires to bring natural elements into our built environment. Often these conditions become, by default, the final expression of Arlington's intentions regarding biophilia and natural resources in the built environment. Pressure on existing available spaces increases as we work together to create new and better locations for Arlington businesses, residences, and parks. Throughout the process we are guided by the Comprehensive Master Plan, Public Spaces Master Plan, Sector plans and specific site plan conditions. The Site Plan Conditions are the area where specific designs and natural biophilic features of the site are determined. Changes to the Site Plan Conditions would be helpful. For example, moving natural design elements and biophilic considerations earlier into the site planning process, Recommendation #5, may help to ensure these concepts have an opportunity to be integrated into planning process while design options are still available.

With these thoughts in mind and with the cooperation of several other commissions, the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) reviewed, discussed, and offers the following suggested changes to Arlington's Standard Site Plan Conditions. Our commission actively participates in the SPRC reviews and believes these recommendations will build additional protections and/or clarify existing protections for future parks, landscaping, public space, and privately owned public space. Please consider the issues and recommendations presented.

1) Issue: Changes to/diminished community benefits **after approval** of site plans

**Recommendation:**

- Changes to community benefits post site plan approval should require relevant commission review and a neighborhood public engagement process.

- Relevant commissions should then submit recommendations to Planning Commission and County Board, with an analysis of the proposed changes to the adopted plan.

2) Issue: Changes in landscaping and public spaces after approval of site plans (often a result of conflicts with Civil Engineering Plan)

**Recommendation:**

- Final Civil Engineering Plan and Final Landscaping Plan, with any design conflicts resolved, should be submitted simultaneously, earlier in the process, and before the adoption of the site plan.
- Reductions in approved vegetated areas from the approved site plan should be required to be made up on-site or require a public review process. (Use Pentagon City Sector Plan with a minimum 10% shrub and vegetated area as a goal.)
- Ensure consistency of Privately Owned Public Spaces with PSMP Design Guidelines, and prohibit non-park related uses (elevator shafts, loading areas, other obstructions) on publicly eased spaces.

3) Issue: Lack of transparency in the process (administrative changes with no public review, additional issues such as fire department or health department exercising veto power after approval)

**Recommendation:**

- Clarify what constitutes an administrative change versus what the community is likely to perceive as substantive changes to an adopted site plan.
- Ensure engagement of fire and health departments earlier in the process (before County Board consideration).

4) Issue: “Minor” site plan amendments with major implications (Examples of “minor” site plan amendments with material changes after the fact: elimination of public access to Central Place Observatory, proposal for adding retail pavilions in Clarendon Market Place, loss, or restriction of designated community meeting spaces in Ballston, Rosslyn, etc.)

**Recommendation:**

- “Minor” site plan changes that affect community benefits should require relevant commission review and a neighborhood public engagement process.
- Relevant commissions should then submit a report to Planning Commission and County Board, with an analysis of the proposed changes to the adopted plan.

5) Issue: Need to incorporate biophilic design principles and expectations early in the process

**Recommendation:**

- Move public space discussion to earlier in the SPRC process and consider siting and architecture as integral to public space and biophilic design. Landscaping and biophilic design should not be an after-thought after the other needs are met.
- Develop an inventory of biophilic design features and guidelines.
- Projects should include a biophilic narrative including how the project exceeds minimum requirements for tree canopy, shrub, and vegetated areas, as well as any unique biophilic design elements.

6) Issue: Cost for failure to replace trees on site has not changed since the inception of the Tree Canopy Fund program in 2007

**Recommendation:**

- At a minimum, double the tree canopy fund contribution from the current 2007 rate of \$2,400 “per tree” to \$4,800 “per replacement tree”.
- Consider significantly raising the cost to \$10,000 per “replacement tree” to encourage more preservation of existing trees and tree planting on site.
- Consider establishing a lost capacity fee to be assessed annually based on estimated ecosystem benefits of lost trees until replacement trees can provide equivalent ecosystem services.

7) Issue: Large canopy trees, that provide significant stormwater and other critical ecosystem services, are routinely destroyed during the development process, even when there is the possibility that they could be saved.

**Recommendation:**

- Establish a standard condition that provides meaningful incentives for the preservation of large canopy trees, such as stormwater credits, variances in setbacks, more flexibility with parking, additional density, etc.

8) Issue: Large-scale private development in the county creates larger deficits of public space relative to the needs of county residents, employees, and visitors.

**Recommendation:**

Where new public space is not provided by a project, establish a standard condition requiring contributions to the county's park acquisition or development budget. e.g., \$5,000 per residential unit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shruti Kупpa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shruti Kупpa  
Chair – Park and Recreation Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board  
Members, Planning Commission  
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager  
Claude Williamson, Director, Department of Community Planning, Housing, and  
Development