



**ARLINGTON COUNTY
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION**

**2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 414
Arlington, Virginia 22201**

January 21, 2021

Matt de Ferranti, Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: County Naming Policy Revisions

Dear Chair de Ferranti,

In December 2020 the County Manager released a proposal to change current practices for naming or renaming public features, such as parks, streets and schools, and installing a single mechanism for all such decisions. We also received a briefing from county staff on the proposal at our January 19 monthly meeting. We would like to offer our initial concerns about this proposal.

The proposal states that the County requires a new naming policy, yet it proposes no policy statement per se. It does provide a list of proposed criteria for selecting names, which is an assortment of relevant provisions that would guide, but not guarantee, that all proposed names would have local reference. The remainder of the proposal describes a plan for a completely new committee and a new, regimented process for bringing naming proposals to the Board.

There may be good reasons for the County to develop a clear and comprehensive policy about how names for public features are selected. The Park and Recreation Commission is currently chartered with the authority to help oversee that function for public parks. This policy and process operates under official County guidelines, and, in fact, works very well. Under the current process, just in 2020, PRC forwarded, and the Board approved, three naming or renaming proposals that met current (and proposed) criteria: Selina Gray Park, John Robinson, Jr Town Square, and Zitkala-Sa Park. All of these proposals were supported by two other advisory groups—the Historic Affairs and Landmarks Review Board and the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Commission—that are part of that official process. All three proposals received praise from Board members, interested engaged civic associations, and PRC members. All three also promoted diversity and equity values into the realm of Arlington place-naming.

The Park and Recreation Commission recognizes that not all naming proposal types may have similar guidance and process mechanisms and results. In particular, some standardization and clarity may be useful if expressed in a county-wide policy that would be the foundation for all such recommendations. However, PRC also is concerned that wholesale changes would destroy a

perfectly functional and successful naming process for parks, while subjecting all county naming proposals to an untested new process.

We question whether packaging naming proposals is a necessary step, rather than letting them come to the Board as they are ready and as Board priorities permit. We are not opposed to such process orchestration if it is beneficial. Doing so would not, however, require the other process changes that have been proposed.

The Park and Recreation Commission usually has a full agenda and shifting the park naming function to a new advisory group would remove the occasional item from that busy agenda. Nonetheless, PRC takes this responsibility seriously, and prioritizes naming proposals as they arise. It is puzzling, that in this proposal PRC's guidelines and experience would not have a primary role in park naming and renaming. The County uses numerous commissions, based on their focus and expertise, to manage or support specific decisions that concern county policies, resources and facilities. These include, for example:

- Commission on the Arts (Grant allocations and public art selections),
- CDCAC (Numerous grant allocations),
- Forestry and Natural Resources (Notable Trees and Tree Canopy Fund),
- HALRB (Renovation approvals),
- Tenant Landlord (Relocation Plans),
- Housing (Affordable Housing proposals)
- Planning and Transportation Commissions, with their specified advisory responsibilities.

Our view of the policy/process proposal is that it may signal a desire for some clarification or codification of some naming functions, notably for streets, but that as a universal change it is misguided and unnecessary. We are supportive of a single overriding county naming policy, and recommend that the park naming policy and process be a model for all naming functions. We do not agree that major changes to the park naming guidelines are broken, although we are open to refinements. (One refinement would be to require a statement of the cost implications of park, street, or facility renaming). But we do not believe that the creation of yet another committee is helpful as far as the park naming process, and in fact are concerned that it would create both process and political dysfunction if authorized as proposed.

Sincerely,



William Ross
Chair, Park and Recreation Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager

Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation