

Urban Forestry Commission
July 24, 2014
Meeting Summary

Attendance

Dean Amel
Nora Palmatier
Steve Campbell
Paul Campanella
Per Midboe
Scott Brinitzer
Karen Kumm Morris
Mikaila Milton

State and County Staff

Jamie Bartalon, DPR
Vincent Verweij, DPR
Rachel Jackson, DPR
Jim McGlone, VDOF
Scott Prisco, APS
Aji Robinson, APS

Guests

Chris Cowles, Davey Tree Experts
Elisha Rubin

Public Comment – There was no public comment. Commission members welcomed Mr. Per Midboe, appointed by the County Board as the Urban Forestry Commission’s newest member. Elisha Rubin introduced herself to commission members. Ms. Rubin is considering applying for appointment to the UFC.

Review of Plans for McKinley School – Scott Prisco and Aji Robinson, APS

Scott Prisco and Aji Robinson (Arlington Public Schools) reviewed plans for the expansion of McKinley Elementary School. The plans have been presented to the Public Facility Review Committee (PFRC) and E2C2. They will soon be presented to the Transportation Commission and the Planning Commission. Use Permit Conditions are now being finalized in preparation for the September 20, 2014, County Board meeting.

Mr. Robinson provided an overview of the school expansion project, currently in the design-development stage. Significant public input was incorporated into the current plans, including comments from the PFRC and the Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC). An arborist was also brought in early in the process to inventory on-site trees and potential tree impacts. The current timeline calls for construction to begin in June 2015, with the expanded school to open in September 2015.

The project vision calls for a sustainable design and open/natural lighting. APS is in the process of refining site design. Concerns include tree impacts and parking. Some design changes were also required in order to accommodate a stormwater line that runs through the site. Plans include two bio-retention areas and an underground stormwater storage facility. Stormwater is being routed in a manner to minimize impacts to trees.

The bulk of the school addition is in the northeast portion of the site. A total of 40 trees will be removed for the project, with 80 trees to be planted. Two “Priority 1” trees are among those slated for removal. One must be removed in order to accommodate current plans for on-site parking. The other will be impacted by construction in the area of the existing “pentagon” expansion. The majority of replacement trees are native to the area, although some cultivars and about 8 crapemyrtles are included on the planting list.

APS is currently examining options to reduce the number of on-site parking spaces from 62 to 56. However, even if a proposed new on-site parking area is reduced in size from 26 spaces to 20 spaces and additional off-site parking is provided along McKinley Road, the plan will still be 26 spaces short of providing the 108 spaces currently required by Zoning. Any further reductions in parking lot size must be balanced with neighborhood impacts of designating additional off-site parking to meet zoning requirements.

Mikaila Milton asked if tree removals can be scheduled for a time when birds are not nesting. Scott Prisco replied that APS can attempt to time tree removals to avoid nesting periods; however, the timing of project approval will drive when site preparation may begin.

Vincent Verweij suggested that APS should consider transplanting the ginkgo trees that need to be removed from the area along McKinley Road to a location on McKinley School grounds. Ideally, the trees should be moved directly to their new location, rather than stored at a holding site. The trees need to be removed due to construction impacts associated with shortening the length of cross walks by installing “bump outs” along the sidewalk.

The project is being designed to meet LEED Silver standards, although it will not be LEED certified due to existing conditions. Sustainability features include retaining rainwater on site, incorporating natural lighting, and reducing the building footprint to help preserve open space by incorporating a three-story addition. Dean Amel asked if the other single-story additions would be designed to support additional stories in the future. Mr. Prisco explained that designing and constructing the other additions to support future vertical expansion would make it difficult to stay within budget and meet the project completion timeline.

Karen Kumm Morris commended APS staff on their public process to gather input on the McKinley School expansion. She commented that, although one of the additions will be three stories, additional open space could have been preserved with additional vertical expansion. She also noted that, although one of the site’s priority trees will still be removed to meet parking requirements, APS has provided a design option that reduces the size of the parking lot.

A motion carried that Dean Amel will circulate a draft letter for commission member review before submitting it to the County Board. The letter will commend APS for working to preserve as many trees as possible, given the size of the needed expansion and lack of funding to build up over the existing structure. It will also encourage the greater use of on-street parking in order to reduce the amount of on-site parking and its impacts to trees and open space. The UFC letter will urge APS to remove trees during the winter in order to minimize the effects on nesting birds, and to transplant existing ginkgo trees on site. It will also urge APS to do more to “build up

rather than out” during future school expansion and construction projects so that impacts to trees and open space can be reduced.

Aji Robinson noted that Arlington County’s Fire Department recently informed APS that they will need to have a 20-foot wide access “road” in order to reach the west side of the building. APS is working through design revisions to minimize the impacts of this requirement.

Annual Review of Standard Site Plan Conditions – Brett Wallace, CPHD and Vincent Verweij, DPR

Brett Wallace (CPHD) briefed the commission on potential updates to Standard Site Plan Conditions that relate to trees and landscaping. Beginning this year, the conditions will be reviewed annually for technical updates. Minor technical changes may be approved administratively; however, substantive changes will require County Board approval.

The following changes to tree-related conditions are currently being considered by staff:

- On-site trees with a caliper size of 3 inches or greater must be identified on plan submissions. Current conditions require the identification of on-site trees with a caliper size of 4 inches or greater. The proposed change will make Standard Site Plan Conditions consistent with Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance requirements.
- All references to the use of tree grates will be eliminated from Standard Site Plan Conditions. Any use of tree grates will be addressed on a case-by-case basis when site conditions warrant consideration.
- Language regarding qualifications for individuals authorized to perform tree replacement calculations will be limited to Certified Arborists and Landscape Architects.
- Examples of tree species from the approved planting list will be removed from the condition language to avoid overuse of particular species.
- Required planting depth for trees will be reduced from 4 feet to 30 inches minimum, or deeper if needed to accommodate the size of the root ball. This roughly corresponds to the “usable” soil depth for functioning feeder roots.
- Recommend that street tree planting begin 30 to 35 feet from the “point of intersection” that defines the vision clearance triangle, where utilities permit.

Karen Kumm Morris emphasized the importance of providing adequate soil volume for street trees, and expressed concern about reducing the required planting depth. She noted that, even though a 30-inch planting depth may be adequate in a natural setting, trees planted in pits in harsh urban environments may send feeder roots deeper than 30 inches.

Vincent Verweij stated that it would be very unusual for roots to derive any benefits from going deeper than 30 inches, and that space for lateral root growth is the key factor for supporting tree growth and health. He noted that requiring continuous soil panels beneath sidewalks between street trees would be a way to provide space for lateral root growth. Ms. Morris recommended that staff should require continuous soil panels between trees and work to further increase useable soil volume beneath sidewalks.

Ms. Kumm Morris also recommended that the condition language for beginning street tree plantings as close as possible to intersections should be worded more strongly. Rather than “recommending that street tree planting begin 30 to 35 feet from the point of intersection”, she advocated for condition language that specifies, “street tree planting shall begin 30 to 35 feet from the point of intersection...” Nora Palmatier agreed that stronger wording is needed in order to ensure that initial plan submissions include street tree layouts that maximize the number of trees per block.

Dean Amel asked staff to keep the commission informed as proposed changes to site plan conditions go through the staff review process. The commission decided that they would write a letter commenting on the proposed changes if County Board adoption is required.

Vincent Verweij encouraged a continued discussion of the proposed changes, especially as they relate to planting depth and soil volume. He invited members to e-mail him to help formulate proposed language for revised conditions.

NRJAG’s Draft Joint Letter on Public Land for Public Good

The commission reviewed and discussed a draft letter prepared by the Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group (NRJAG) on the concept of “Public Land for Public Good” and its possible impact on the implementation of the Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP). The letter expresses concern that the potential use of several parcels of County-owned land for the development of schools, housing and other possible uses would not be consistent with Recommendation #1 in the NRMP, which calls for adoption of a general policy goal of “zero loss” of County-owned natural lands.

NRJAG has asked the UFC, E2C2 and the Park and Recreation Commission to sign the letter. E2C2 has approved signing the letter. Paul Campanella remarked that developing County-owned open space for other purposes sets a dangerous precedent and constitutes a real threat to open space. A motion for the UFC to sign the letter was approved.

Review of Two Draft Letters

The commission discussed and approved two letters to be submitted to the County Board:

1. Gables North Rolfe – The approved UFC letter for this development project incorporates additional comments provided by Steve Campbell and includes the following recommendations:
 - Adjust the locations of street trees near existing utilities in order to allow two additional trees to be planted near street corners.
 - Provide regular staff oversight during park construction to assure that tree preservation requirements are being met.

- Install a water spigot within the park so that trees and other plants can be readily watered.
 - Increase the width of planting strips along the Fairfax Drive/Arlington Boulevard multi-use trail and the median between the two roadways to enhance tree health and development.
2. 2015 Legislative Priorities – The draft letter prepared by Nora Palmatier for Arlington’s 2015 legislative priorities was approved and includes the following suggestions:
- Consult with Delegate Patrick Hope regarding the need to reintroduce legislation to more strictly regulate invasive plants.
 - Establish procedures for licensing arborists in Virginia and require anyone providing tree care services for hire to be licensed.
 - Consult with local delegates on possible legislative or administrative changes to VDOT processes that would mandate closer cooperation between VDOT and localities on tree impacts, removals and replanting associated with state road projects.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes for the June 26, 2014 UFC meeting were approved.

Staff Reports

- Jamie Bartalon reported that DPR staff are continuing to work with Phoenix Bikes on issues relating to the possible use of the existing Phoenix Bikes site at Barcroft Park for construction of a new facility. Phoenix Bikes is currently working on a concept plan and feasibility documents for use of the site.
- Vincent Verweij confirmed that a volunteer tree planting project funded by Casey Trees will be held on December 6, at Butler Holmes Park in the Penrose area. Volunteers are needed.
- Vincent Verweij informed commission members of a blog based upon the concept of treating trees as infrastructure. He will send commission members a link to the blog site.

Commission Member Reports

Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group – Caroline Haynes’ Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group report is attached.

Park and Recreation Commission – Caroline Haynes’ Park and Recreation Commission report is attached.

Planning Activities – Karen Kumm Morris’ Planning Activities Report is attached. Steve Campbell will try to attend the July 28, 2014 SPRC meeting on development of the Wendy’s site in the Courthouse area.

A Site Plan Review Working Group is proposing revisions to the review process that will no longer permit Planning Commission members to represent another commission on the SPRC. As a result, Ms. Kumm Morris will no longer be able to serve as representative for UFC on the SPRC. The revisions will also eliminate “Standing Membership” representation of the UFC and several other commissions on the SPRC. Instead, representatives from the UFC and other commissions may serve in an advisory capacity to the SPRC. Rather than being encouraged to attend all SPRC review meetings, the UFC and other commissions serving in an advisory capacity may elect to be represented at any SPRC review session in which they have an interest.

Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) – No report.

Environment and Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2) – No report.

Champion Trees Committee – No report. Future information on Champion Trees will be covered under “Staff Reports”.

Tree Stewards – Nora Palmatier’s Tree Steward report is attached.

Tree Canopy Fund – Dean Amel encouraged UFC members to reply to Elenor Hodges’ calendar request for two Tree Canopy Fund Grant review sessions. There have not yet been a sufficient number of responses to schedule the second review session.

Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC) – Elizabeth Rives’ Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee report is attached.

Northern Virginia Urban Forestry Roundtable – The next roundtable will be held at the Fairfax County Government Center on September 5. It will include a discussion of soil volume and tree health.

Virginia Department of Forestry – Jim McGlone will forward an e-mail to County staff about reporting GPS coordinates of emerald ash borer (EAB) locations to VDOF. He also announced that the annual tree health care workshop in Waynesboro, Virginia is scheduled for September 12.

Arlington Public Schools (APS) – Jim Meikle (APS) was unable to attend the UFC meeting, but will provide an update to the commission on the Claremont School stormwater project soon.

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) – No report.

New Business: No New Business. The UFC will not meet in August.

Attachments to July 24, 2014 Urban Forestry Commission Meeting Summary:

Natural Resources Joint Advisory Committee – Caroline Haynes

Mary Van Dyke and Alan Ford provided a presentation on the Plant NoVA Natives social marketing campaign to encourage property owners to ask for and purchase native plants and to encourage the nursery industry to offer more native plants to the public. This is a regional effort modeled on a very successful program on the Eastern shore of VA.

In light of some of the sites identified for potential development in the “Public Land for Public Good” discussion, NRJAG members agreed to urge PRC, UFC and E2C2 to support signing the attached letter reaffirming Recommendation #1 of the Natural Resources Management Plan to have a zero loss of existing natural lands.

Note: UFC will be asked to consider this letter at Thursday's meeting (7/24/2014).

Park and Recreation Commission – Caroline Haynes

The PRC met at Lubber Run Recreation Center and heard from members of the community who are concerned about the encroachment of development within our parks and open space. The PRC sent the attached letter to the Board concerning the staff report on the “Public Land for Public Good”.

Jim Feaster provided an update on the Neighborhood Conservation process and upcoming projects.

Liz Birnbaum, Co-Chair of the Four Mile Run Task Force, raised concerns about the current site plan for The Berkeley redevelopment, which is the first site plan to be considered under the Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan and violates some of the key guidelines such as driveway set backs from the RPA and a fence along the Four Mile Run trail. If these items are not adequately addressed during the SPRC process, the commission agreed to send a letter to the Board prior to consideration by the Planning Commission.

Laura Lazour, DPR Division Chief for Sports and Recreation, provided an overview of programming and needs at community centers.

Planning Activities – Karen Kumm Morris

Site Plans under Review:

The Gables - Fort Myers North Sector Plan, new County Park with 421 Residential units, will go to the County Board in September

Wendy's - Courthouse Square, an 185,000 SF office building with ground floor retail, first SPRC on July 28, 2014.

Park Shirlington - Fairlington, controversial 750 dwelling units and rezoning, one SPRC held thus far, SP will not likely move quickly.

Keys Boulevard Apartments - Western Rosslyn, controversial 158 units, redevelopment of existing garden apartments. Significant old trees.

The Berkeley - Four Mile Run bordering Alexandria, 287 residential units, will go to the County Board in October.

Block M - Crystal City, mixed use redevelopment - 353 residential units, and 658,365 SF office.

400 Army Navy Drive - Crystal City along S. Eads - 458 residential units, issue with County's transit maintenance facility lacking sidewalks and street trees.

Rosslyn Plaza - Next to Artisphere, 300-350 residential units, 1.86 million SF office in 5 buildings, major open spaces, County Board date TBD.

Site Plans Recently approved by CB in July:

10th Street Flats - Clarendon. Good street tree layout

Block 6 - Crystal City, change from office to residential use in an existing old vacant office building. WeWorks concept. No streetscape improvements.

Site Plans in Preliminary staff review:

Ballston Mall Revitalization - Ballston, mixed use redevelopment of mall with new residential tower, street oriented Wilson Blvd retail.

Pentagon Centre - Costco site in Pentagon City. PDSP plan review. No LRPC dates set.

Site Plans on Hold:

Shreve Apartments - East Falls Church along Lee Hwy., 228 residential units, rezoning, on hold status likely to be withdrawn.

American Service Center - Ballston along Glebe, TBD.

Planning Activities:

Courthouse Square - 3rd Community Workshop held July 23, 2014. Three concepts presented and are on the County's website for your review. All three concepts preserve the Memorial trees, and a balance of hardscape and green area is proposed in all three as well. There are differences in where the proposed County office building is located and this decision will have an impact on the green area. One concept will move forward in the study, Commissions will weigh in during September/October (UFC should ask to be a part of that input) and the study will be presented to the County Board in December. An addendum to the Courthouse Sector Plan will follow CB's policy guidance and more detailed recommendations on development of the open space.

Rosslyn Sector Plan Addendum - Subcommittees are working on various components of the Sector Plan following the County Board's approval of the Framework Plan. Challenges are building heights, TDR density, VDOT's Air Rights development over I-66, and many others.

Continue to advocate for a greener public realm with closely spaced street trees and soil volume sufficient to sustain mature trees.

SPRC Working Group - An initiative to improve the SPRC process introducing a pre-application step to the process (potentially achieving more responsive plans prior to submissions), a shortened review process if project complies with County policies, master plans and zoning and a more manageable number of SPRC membership. The changes included moving UFC from a standing membership to an advisory group representative that can "elect to be represented at any review". The standing membership commissions (only PRC and TC are proposed to be standing members) are encouraged/required to attend all SPRC meetings. From what I gather, the UFC would still receive notification of SPRC filings but would not necessarily have to attend all SPRC meetings. Tracking might be more challenging. See attached doc for full details.

Tree Stewards – Nora Palmatier

The following report on a Tree Steward effort to assist County staff with identifying “overgrown” tree grates was prepared by Tree Steward Richard Fontwengler:

Grate Project Protects Our Street Trees

In March of this year teams of Tree Stewards fanned out along the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor to inspect street trees growing in planter pits with tree grates. Arlington County, short on resources to survey the condition of tree grates, requested help in identifying those trees that were having problems living within the often limited space provided by the grates.

Vincent Verweij, Arlington County Urban Forester, saw this project as a “fantastic educational opportunity for Tree Stewards and a clear assist to the county’s efforts to protect and maintain street trees”. With the Tree Stewards doing the assessment Arlington could use its limited resources to remedy any problems found and reported by the teams.



Trunk damage caused before grate was enlarged

The teams counted and inspected 194 grates in the corridor and found that almost 60% (101) of the grates were found to need attention with 12% (22) overgrowing the grate, 21% (38) touching the grate, 13% (24) had roots lifting the grate, and 14% (27) had grown to within one inch of the grate and would need attention soon.

The findings highlight the potential problems of using grates in the first place. While they do provide trees with some protection from compacting soil around roots and damage to the base of the trunk, too often they are not monitored and maintained properly. Also, many of the grates had surprisingly small center holes so if the tree was not planted dead center in the planting pit, or was lucky enough to thrive and grow large, it was doomed to eventually come in contact with the grate.

Tree Stewards were able to see the evolution of tree grate design over the 30 years or so the grates have been used in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor. Styles ranged from the traditional heavy cast iron grates to those made of lighter metals or plastic/composites. Some were more ornamental and some were more functional. Virtually all the grates we inspected were installed by developers as part of their projects which accounts for the variety of grates found.



An example of a larger soil panel with sectioned grate that is easy to enlarge.

As a result of the problems we observed with tree grates and the continued threat to girdling and damaging street trees planted within grates, Vincent is now recommending that developers of new projects use simple soil pits without grates for their street tree plantings. The county is also asking developers to do a better job maintaining their tree pits and street trees after completion of their projects.



Larger spaces are provided for tree roots in the “soil panels” now required

Armed with the Tree Steward’s spread sheet report, the County Urban Forrester was able to enter the locations of trees/grates that needed attention and/or removal on a map for the maintenance crews. While some of the grates can be modified to increase the size of the center hole most must be removed when a tree makes contact with the grate. The crews are working through the list as they have time and most of the

offending grates have now been removed. In one instance the grates were part of a recent development and the developer was asked to do the work.



Large soil panels can also have flowers as a deterrent to walking on tree roots.

All in all a successful project and a perfect example of Tree Steward volunteers and the county working together in partnership to maintain and protect a most valuable resource: street trees!

Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee – Elizabeth Rives

The biggest news on the NCAC front is that the Board approved the County Manager's recommended \$12 million bond request for the Neighborhood Conservation program. The referendum will be on the ballot in November for voter approval.

NCAC is also preparing to celebrate its 50th anniversary with a catered soiree on September 18 at the Gallery Underground (Arlington Artists Alliance) in Crystal City from 6:30-9:30. (NC reps are paying \$20/rep from their neighborhood funds -- NCAC is not underwriting the celebration.)

The Committee also approved the naming of the park at Gables N. Rolfe St. as "Three Oaks" park. (UFC member Steve Campbell eloquently presented the case for the new name, and Bernie Berne's suggestion to have it named after a historic figure who was influential in the neighborhood was rejected).

Finally, the Committee heard a presentation from Richard Best, Principal Planner, DES, on the new "Neighborhood Complete Streets (NCS)" initiative. County staff is working with the old Neighborhood Traffic Calming Committee to rebrand as NCS (oh goodie, more acronyms to confuse with all the others). Although defunct, staff still gets calls for Traffic Calming. The NCS Committee will have a new focus on safety and accessibility for pedestrians, bicycles, transit access, and ADA, and will draft a new charter with a public participation model and project

ranking system. Proposed funding is \$100k pay go, \$255k in CIP money in FY '15, and \$900k in CIP money from FY '16 to FY' 24.

NCAC's next meeting will be the 50th anniversary celebration in September.

Letter Proposed by NRJAG on Public Land for Public Good:

July XX, 2014

The Honorable Jay Fisette
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Public Land for Public Good and NRMP

Dear Chairman Fisette:

As member commissions of the Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group (NRJAG), we appreciate having this opportunity to share our perspective on the discussion of the concept of “Public Land for Public Good” and the possible impact on the implementation of the Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP).

As you know, in 2010 the Board adopted the NRMP. The development of the NRMP was called for in the 2005 Public Spaces Master Plan, which is an element of the Comprehensive Plan. Recommendation #1 of the NRMP is identified as Priority 1 and states: “Adopt a general policy goal of “Zero-Loss” of County-owned natural lands.” The NRMP further states: “The recommendations within the Plan are prioritized according to recommended needs for implementation, with Priority 1 being the highest priority. Upon adoption of the Plan, Arlington County will serve as a role model for environmental stewardship within the region by providing cooperative leadership in the area of natural resources management, resource protection and public education.” (NRMP p.5)

We are concerned that the use of several parcels of land under discussion by the County Manager for potential development of schools, housing and other possible uses would not be consistent with this key recommendation. In adopting the NRMP, the Board recognized the myriad public benefits provided by protecting the very limited remaining parcels of County-owned natural land, which include: cleaning our water and air, reducing storm water run-off, cooling the heat island effect of our increasingly urban community, supporting biodiversity, promoting mental and physical health benefits for our residents and increasing property values.

We fully understand the need to expand housing and schools to accommodate the growing population, but neither should come at the expense of designated natural lands. Few natural areas remain for acquisition in Arlington, and restoring developed properties to a natural state requires a lifetime. Accordingly, when natural lands are lost, it is unlikely that they will ever be replaced.

We urge the Board to reaffirm Recommendation #1 of the NRMP and reject consideration of parcels of existing natural lands for potential development. The decisions we make today will have an impact on our community for generations to come and it is vital to protect what little remains of our existing natural lands.

Sincerely,

Dean Amel, Chair
Urban Forestry Commission

Scott Dicke, Chair
Environment and Energy Conservation Commission

Caroline Haynes, Chair
Park and Recreation Commission