



March 29, 2021

Honorable Matt de Ferranti, Chair
Arlington County Board
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: FNRC Comments and Priorities for the DPR FY2022 Proposed Operating Budget

Dear Chair de Ferranti:

The Forestry and National Resources Commission (FNRC) reviewed the Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) FY 22 Proposed Operating Budget Commissions Briefing set of slides at our February 25, 2021 meeting. It is clear the DPR plays a crucial role in Arlington. Its many parks, facilities and programs are central to the quality of life of Arlingtonians and are vitally important in making Arlington an attractive and pleasing place to live.

The COVID crisis has underscored the importance of the DPR. The parks and outdoor facilities that have been accessible have likely been critical to the well-being of residents during this difficult time, which is now entering its second year. The use of the parks and park programs has increased significantly over the past year and shows no signs of abatement. Given the importance of parks, we are concerned about several elements of the budget proposal.

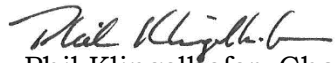
First, we believe it is a mistake to reduce the capacity for park maintenance in FY 22. Indeed, we believe this area is one that is actually worth expanding. During the COVID shutdown, families have intensively used the parks and consequently have learned about the benefits of being in nature. The use of natural park areas, natural trails, and conservation areas, which offer COVID-safe outings, increased radically over the last year. During this increase in use, we also experienced serious damage from stormwater and deer browse. There also was significant tree loss from pests and tree deaths related to climate change. We believe that as our society emerges from this pandemic, families will continue to use the parks in more ways than in the pre-pandemic past. Therefore, we recommend against reducing funding for temporary, seasonal staff that assist with "coverage on daily division maintenance tasks including maintaining trails, playgrounds, spraygrounds, athletic fields, picnic shelters, dog parks, streams, clearing debris after storms, watering trees, refuse removal and performing general custodial work." (PNR Reduction 4.67 temporary FTEs — (\$200,000)).

Second, we oppose cutting funding for the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). The extension service is extremely active in Arlington and is critical to many areas where we have had the greatest successes in preserving our tree canopy and natural resources. We understand that by eliminating 50% of the local VCE budget, Arlington would lose 60% of its programmatic staff, including two full-time Extension Agents, the Extension Master Gardener Coordinator, and the Financial Program Associate. These losses would adversely affect the plethora of programs these staff administer, as well as the social equity issues that are of concern to all county residents and that are addressed by the staff. The County's relationships with Virginia Cooperative Extension and our land grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State, are also at risk. (Reduce Funding for Virginia Cooperative Extension —(\$63,682))

Third, we view the elimination of funding for the Northern Virginia Conversation Trust (NV CT) as shortsighted. Conservation in the larger area is beneficial to Arlington in terms of air quality and watershed resources. NVCT currently owns a number of tracts under conservation easement in Arlington and requires resources to manage them effectively. Moreover, if we wish to encourage future activity by NVCT in Arlington, we should continue to contribute to the fund. (Eliminate Funding for Northern Virginia Conversation Trust — (\$90,159))

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer, Chair
Forestry and Natural Resources Commission

Cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation