
**MEETING MINUTES OF THE HYBRID
ARLINGTON COUNTY FORESTRY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION**

1/23/25

The **FORESTRY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION** convened its meeting at 7:00 **PM** on 1/23/25.

PRESENT (IN-PERSON) Caroline Haynes, Elizabeth Gearin, Bob Benson, Noreen Hannigan, Steve Sockwell, John Carey, Josh Handler

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY) David Howell, Nia Bagley, Bill Browning

ABSENT Phil Klingelhofer, Neal Hunter, Mikaila Milton

STAFF Vincent Verweij (DPR), Steven Bernheisel (APS)

MOTIONS & ACTIONS/VOTES

Public Comment

No public comment

County board liaison JD Spain

County Board member JD Spain came to the commission. The commissioners introduced themselves.

JD Spain introduced himself and spoke about environmental policy issues and his role as a liaison with the commission, and trying to be inclusive. JD opened the conversation to questions, and the following conversations came up:

- Making the committee more representative
- Encouraging environmental justice
- How to get to 40% tree canopy
- Tree canopy campaigns
- How to work with the staff in the County
- Getting students involved with the environment
- Connections to faith-based communities
- Interest in learning more about stormwater and environmental issues
- Context with national politics
- Planning for the future
- Budget contexts
- Impacts from public projects
- Site plan review meetings
- How the Board Member can be the best liaison, and how to prioritize
- Providing a summary of highlights of the commission
- Lot coverage and conflict with other land uses
- Interrelationships between FNRP and other plans.

The board member shared his contact information and thanked the commission for their work.

Transportation Plan Update – David Howell

David Howell updated the commission on the transportation plan and asked for goals and guiding principles from the commission.

A discussion followed about:

- Scope of the FNRC's involvement with this project
- Focus on items about green infrastructure.
- Creating new spaces for green infrastructure
- Wording of "vehicle" vs. "motor vehicle"
- Too much parking/take back the streets/decommissioning sections of streets
- Conflicts between bike lanes, roads, and plantable space
- Adapting designs sensitive to context.

Update on actions in the legislative assembly – Bob Benson

Bob Benson went down to Richmond. He described 6 bills, 3 forestry, 3 invasive plant bills. He described the context in which these were introduced.

Arlington Public Schools/DPR collaboration and letter

Chair Haynes spoke about collaborations with invasives with APS. Bill Browning spoke about collaboration at Ashlawn Elementary School. Steve spoke about work at Jamestown and Claremont. Bob Benson asked for further action in March.

Tree Canopy Analysis Subcommittee – Vincent Verweij

Vincent Verweij asked the commission for ideas on what to do with the recent tree canopy analysis.

- Identify tall trees for specimen tree program. Use existing specimen trees to set a baseline
- Communications
- Identifying areas that do not have trees
- Civic Associations is too blunt/coarse of a resolution
- Share with health department, overlay asthma and cardiovascular disease
- Involve other people outside of Commission/other staff.
- Suggest bringing in some folks of ATAG
- Connecting with Virginia Health Center

Vincent will send out an email for volunteers to the commission to meet and get analysis ideas.

Tree Canopy Fund Letter – Caroline Haynes

Chair Haynes suggested delaying the tree canopy fund letter until budget letter and suggested an interim virtual meeting.

Josh Handler suggested several items to stay on top of, like invasive plant management and nature centers. The Chair asked about impact to new maintenance program. David Howell outlined issues with

the program as it is outlined and think towards a more sustainable program towards FY 2027. A conversation talked about focusing on equity and reducing tree size in the Tree Canopy Fund. A meeting may be held to discuss this more going forward.

Approval of December Minutes – Caroline Haynes

Approved unanimously, with David Howell and Noreen Hannigan abstaining.

Staff Reports – Vincent Verweij

Forestry:

Maintenance:

- Circuit Tree Maintenance at Arlington Ridge has been completed, with approximately 600 trees treated at this location. Aurora Highlands is moving to the final batch, and Crystal City/Pentagon City/Potomac Yard is being inventoried. Tree Crew will be working along S Greenbrier St for Circuit Maintenance on Jan. 21st-24th. See progress at: <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Office-of-Sustainability-and-Environment/Trees/Tree-Maintenance-and-Health/Public-Trees/Circuit-Tree-Maintenance>
- Tree crews assisted with snow operations

Planning:

Special Exception projects (site plans, use permits)

- In review:
 - Staff reviewed the site plan 2500 Wilson Blvd (SPLA24-00034). The site plan needs to meet the MWCOG requirements of 25 % canopy cover. One street tree is missing, and the plaza needs a 40% canopy cover total.
 - Staff is working along with the applicant's engineer to try and get the final comments addressed on the 2415 Shirlington Road and close the CEP permit. There is a strong desire among the community and historic preservation to move this permit through, without compromising requirements.
 - Staff reviewed the plans 4601 Fairfax Drive. This site has a low canopy cover requirement of 10% and recommendations were made to add more trees as a buffer from the adjacent park.
 - Staff is finalizing review of the Melwood project, a development project with some neighborhood opposition. The project has adjusted their landscape plan to meet the 25% canopy cover requirement, and street tree spacing, so staff is ready to sign off and rely on the planner to coordinate public comment.

DES

- Projects will start getting split between urban foresters Melissa Gildea and Andrew Benjamin. Andrew will be taking on intersections, sidewalks, signals, bus stops, and drinking water/sewer projects. Melissa Gildea will keep reviewing stormwater, facilities, and large road projects.

By-right projects

- Urban forester Diego Murcia will be taking on new single-family home projects.

Tree Planting:

- Staff is following up on replacement plantings, and finalizing the recording of Fall 2024 trees.

- Arbor Day will likely occur at Abingdon Elementary School this year. The target date is April 11. An invite will go out to all commissioners once confirmed.
- Staff is working with management intern Chloe Kienzle to have her find tree planting sites for additional stormwater fund money available for planting.
- Staff is working through commemorative tree applications.

Outreach/volunteering:

- Staff met with Phil Jubert of the City of Alexandria, about the structural pruning program. We will move forward with a training this spring which will allow Tree Stewards to prune in Arlington and Alexandria, as a first step toward a cooperative program.
- Staff will be presenting on urban forestry programs and tree canopy at Lyon Park Civic Association, and the Bellevue Garden Club.

Other:

- Urban forester Andrew Benjamin is serving on the regional MAC-ISA board after being elected to this position late last year.

Natural Resources:

Deer project: work on drone surveys is taking place with permissions for flight, police contacts and more being underway with planned surveys to take place during the week of March 17. Protocols for the modified deCalesta browse surveys (based on what Fairfax uses) and the deer exclosures (based on what NPS uses) are written up and reaching their final stages. Emails continue to be received both for and against sharpshooting program each week.

IPC has begun work on the southern end of Bluemont Junction Park. Just over half of the combined funding for invasives work (dedicated and one time) has been spent and we are on track to use the full amount.

Commissioner Reports

Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group (Caroline Haynes)

No meeting in January. Next meeting is scheduled for February 3.

Park and Recreation Commission (Neal Hunter)

No report

Public Spaces Master Plan Implementation Advisory Group (Caroline Haynes)

Staff is beginning work on a plan to update the 2019 Public Spaces Master Plan. The update is expected to focus on a few key areas and not a full blown rewrite, as much of the 2019 plan is still being implemented.

Planning Activities/SPRC (Steve Sockwell, Caroline Haynes, David Howell, Bob Benson)

Caroline Haynes:

River house: I attended the somewhat unusual SPRC meeting on the River House on January 16. This was unusual in that JBG presented a "conceptual plan" rather than an updated 4.1 submission. The

original 4.1 submission deviated significantly from what was called for in the recently adopted Pentagon City Sector Plan, with significantly more and lower buildings that consumed much of the planned open space and green ribbon. The original plan was roundly criticized by staff and commission representatives for not adhering to the Pentagon City Sector Plan.

The revised plan presented in January, breaks up the PDSP into phases, with the lower density buildings coming on line first, and higher density (20-22 story residential buildings) to be considered at a later date. The revised concept plan hews much closer to the adopted guidelines in the Pentagon City Sector Plan. Neighbors along Arlington Ridge oppose the additional density, focusing on the potential to block their views. I, along with many of the other commission and other representatives, supported JBGs revised concept plan and its adherence to the recently adopted Pentagon City Sector Plan.

Steve Sockwell:

I attended a December 19, 2024, SPRC. If you recall, this is a proposal for a 5 story mixed use project on the site of a former school in South Arlington. The Aurora Heights Civic Association opposed this one, primarily on the grounds of too much density and poor design features and continues to do so. Personally I think the design is handsome, and the project does bring a substantial amount (105 units) of affordable housing. In terms of tree issues, I continued to advocate for 25% canopy coverage onsite (the applicant is up to 23% as of the SPRC.). Also, the LRPC Report (preceding the SPRC) stated a goal of preserving as much of existing mature trees in the northwest corner of the site. The applicant is not preserving those trees, but the choices imposed by site design really make conservation impractical and some of the trees are not in great shape. I didn't sense outrage over the loss of the tree patch and that didn't seem to be a sticking point for the committee. Additionally, the SPRC pushed for better landscaping and more greenery to serve as a buffer to the park the rear of the site.

In terms of scheduling, the SPRC process is finished. The Planning Commission will consider Melwood on February 10 and the County Board takes it up on February 22.

Parks Review Subcommittee (David Howell)

No report

Public Facilities Review Commission (Vacant)

No report

Tree Stewards (Noreen Hannigan)

The Tree Stewards of Arlington and Alexandria are working with EcoAction Arlington on a Tree Canopy Fund planting for Spring 2025. A trip to the nursery in Luray, VA, is tentatively planned for sometime the week of Feb. 10-14 (but not finalized yet). Once the applications have been reviewed and trees chosen, Tree Steward volunteers will help select the trees to be dug up and brought to Arlington for planting. (Note: Application-review sessions are scheduled for the last week of January. Two FNRC commissioners participate in the process along with County staff.)

The surveying of the 4,000+ Tree Canopy Fund trees planted since 2009 will continue this year. A survey to check on whether trees survived and what condition they're in was done in 2017, and will be done

again in 2025. Tree Steward volunteers will visit homes in Arlington to collect information on the trees, distribute educational materials to homeowners (on such things as correcting mulching problems, removing ivy, etc.), and other volunteers will enter and analyze the data.

Volunteers worked on controlling invasive plants at Lacey Woods and Fort Scott Parks in January. In addition, Nora Palmatier conducted an informal Winter Tree ID Walk at Lacey Woods Park to give Tree Stewards a chance to practice their basic skills.

Tree Canopy Fund (Vacant)

New tree canopy applications are being reviewed in late June

Bicycle Advisory Committee (Noreen Hannigan)

The Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) met on Monday, Jan. 6, 2024. The meeting centered around the development of the Master Transportation Plan (MTP). Attendees were each asked to read the goals as set out in the previous MTP and whether the goals need to be changed. Mr. Mike Hanna, BAC member and representative to the MTP Advisory Group, gave a presentation on what came out of the public engagement survey. Attendees expressed their opinions and raised issues they would like to see addressed. Generally they are in favor of encouraging more people to ride bicycles in the future and want the County to ensure safe biking conditions (including more protected lanes). The recent snow storm was on some people's minds. While attendees were generally appreciative that the main trails (such as the Custis and the W&OD) had been cleared promptly, others were disappointed that most of the bike lanes along County streets were not cleared and believe that the County should purchase the necessary equipment and put the same level of resources into clearing bike lanes as automobile lanes.

Mr. Elwyn Gonzales (DES staff liaison to the BAC) closed with a question for future discussion: What does the BAC want to achieve in 2025?

Northern Virginia Urban Forestry Roundtable (Vincent Verweij)

No report

Arlington Neighborhoods Advisory Committee (Phil Klingelhofer)

No report

Climate Change, Energy, and Environment Commission (Mikaila Milton)

No report

Virginia Department of Forestry (Jacob Zielinski)

No report

Arlington Public Schools (Steven Bernheisel)

Arbor Day is planned for April 11, at 10 AM, at Abingdon Elementary School
Virginia Cooperative Extension (Kirsten Conrad)

No report

New Business:

Meeting adjourned at 9:26 PM.