



January 27, 2023

Honorable Christian Dorsey, Chair
Arlington County Board
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: NOVA Parks Stewardship in 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

Dear Chair Dorsey:

On December 15, 2022, the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) received a briefing from Paul Gilbert, Executive Director of NOVA Parks, regarding NOVA Parks' 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. The FNRC was pleased to learn of NOVA Parks' plans to increase its focus on important areas of stewardship and looks forward to working with NOVA Parks as their plans are implemented. As Mr. Gilbert stated in his talk, additional land is difficult to obtain in Arlington, so enhancing the ecological benefits of existing land is the best course of action available. In addition, the FNRC applauds NOVA Parks' other initiatives, such as increasing programs for communities of color and reducing the use of fossil fuels in park activities.

First, the FNRC welcomes NOVA Parks' new funding to control invasive plants in its parks located in Arlington. Volunteers and park staff have been making noticeable progress in removing invasive plants and restoring habitat at Upton Hill Regional Park, and we welcome the prospect of more resources coming to bear in months to come. Potomac Overlook Regional Park, however, is a much larger property where more resources are needed to tackle the increasing presence of invasive plants and loss of habitat. The FNRC applauds NOVA Parks for its stated intention of making the ecological health of Potomac Overlook a priority in years to come.

The FNRC also welcomes NOVA Parks' plans to expand its community outreach to underserved neighborhoods and schools. The Commission notes that NOVA Parks has already begun partnering with organizations such as the Arlington NAACP, Arlington Regional Master Naturalists, the Culmore Boys and Girls Club, and the Boy Scouts of America to encourage interest in science and nature among students. It is important to continue to build on these efforts so that the next generation will be involved in the science of ecology and stewardship.

The FNRC would also like to highlight NOVA Parks' goal of cutting the use of fossil fuels by converting to electric vehicles and electric mowers. The FNRC recognizes that these are positive steps toward reducing air and noise pollution and encourages NOVA

Parks to reduce use of other gasoline-powered equipment, in particular leaf blowers, as technology improves and makes them more practical for crews working outdoors.

Lastly, the FNRC notes that NOVA Parks plans to consider changes to the Washington and Old Dominion (W&OD) Trail through Arlington in order to improve user safety, capacity as a transportation corridor, and stormwater management. The Commission understands that no design proposals have been formulated yet, and that NOVA Parks is aware that there will be challenges posed by the proximity of Four Mile Run, Dominion Energy powerlines, and Arlington County property. Mr. Gilbert expressed NOVA Parks' sensitivity to the ecological issues posed and said that their studies will consider both users' and environmental concerns before any proposals are made. While reserving judgement on the project, the FNRC is encouraged to hear that NOVA Parks is aware of the ecological vulnerability of the land adjacent to the trail and hopes that any eventual redesign will include protections for existing trees, wetlands, and riparian areas. In addition, a redesign would provide an opportunity to bring more ecologically important meadows to Arlington by using open areas under the powerlines. Some areas currently have little biodiversity but have great potential to become meadows that would benefit all forms of wildlife.

In summary, the FNRC commends NOVA Parks for its positive approach to improving wildlife habitat at Upton Hill and Potomac Overlook Regional Parks, reducing use of fossil fuels, and expanding its efforts to be inclusive of the entire community. The FNRC looks forward to supporting NOVA Parks on these initiatives. In addition, the FNRC will follow with interest future plans for improvements to the W&OD Trail to ensure that they will preserve and enhance its natural assets. The FNRC believes that, with the adoption of the positive elements in the Strategic Plan, Arlington residents and visitors can learn from and enjoy the natural areas in NOVA Parks for generations to come.

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