



March 24, 2022

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

Re: Recommendations for FY23 Budget

Dear Chair Cristol:

First, the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) would like to acknowledge the very hard work during extraordinary times by Ms Rudolph and her staff, at all levels, managing and protecting our wonderful parks and our precious natural resources, providing meaningful nature education to the public, and planning for our future. Thank you.

The FNRC met on February 24 and discussed the County's upcoming FY23 Budget. We understand that this is a very tight budget and proper compensation for County staff is an important priority, which we strongly support. We do think that we can point out a few areas where a modest increase in funding will make a huge difference for Arlingtonians. These areas are as follows:

Increase funding for removal of invasive species. The program for removal of invasive species has been funded at a flat level of \$100,000 annually for ten years from 2012-2022. Currently about two-thirds of that program goes for active management or removal of plants and another one-third goes for maintenance of previous efforts. We believe the staff and volunteers have made extraordinary progress over the last decade; however we would like to see more funds allocated to expedite efforts to eradicate invasive species. We are particularly concerned that maintenance may be underfunded going forward. During the last ten years the County has added new parks and maintenance needs will be sharply increasing in the future.

Provide funding for a new Tree Canopy Survey. We ask the County to fund a new survey to measure the County's urban canopy. The County last did a study in 2017, and a new survey is urgently needed now. We believe such a survey would be relatively inexpensive and provide a highly informative comparison with the earlier study. A new survey would allow assessment of how and where valuable trees are being lost. The survey also is crucial for understanding issues of equity, by documenting both the current disparity in tree canopy coverage between historically disadvantaged neighborhoods and more affluent neighborhoods, and the extent to which trees are being disproportionately lost in those disadvantaged and lower income neighborhoods. Moreover, the County should

provide similar, recurring future funding for surveys about the status of other natural resources, such as water quality, erosion or biodiversity. We believe that these modest sums will allow the County to tailor strategies for conserving and enhancing the natural gifts that are essential for the County's future.

Provide funding for execution of a plan to address the results of the Deer Survey. We noted in our letter of 2020 that while deer are delightful to see in the wild, when the population levels are too high, they are very destructive to trees and the natural habitat that is precious to all wildlife, and even deleterious to the deer themselves. We applaud the County for having funded a deer survey last year. Now, however, we will need to do something about the overpopulation of deer that the survey identified. We note that most other nearby jurisdictions have used similar surveys and have adopted measures for dealing with overpopulation of deer. We ask that the budget include funding to develop and move forward with an action plan to address the results of the survey and protect our precious natural resources.

Provide funding to hire additional employees at the Nature Center. Recently a new policy has been introduced that requires a minimum of two county staff to be on-site whenever a nature center is open. This is a wise policy for the public and staff. But it can limit the delivery of very popular and important programming to the public, makes program scheduling complicated and subject to change, and inequitably impacts those whose age or capability favors visiting nature centers when they are less busy. However, there is no funding for additional employees to help provide this coverage. Therefore, either volunteers or staff, who have other duties, will have to fill the gap or hours of service must be cut. We strongly support a robust and active education and outreach effort to support the County's goals for protection of natural areas and our tree canopy and our steps to include biophilic principles throughout our community. We believe the County should provide some increased funding for Nature Center positions and continue to look at scheduling options to best meet the needs of the broader community.

The FNRC would like to stress that none of our suggestions should cost huge sums. Each, however, would significantly enhance the quality of our natural resources and the overall health and well-being of the County's citizens.

Next year, after adoption of the updated Forestry and Natural Resources Master Plan, we will likely have additional budget requests to support the elements of that plan.

We thank you for the opportunity to present the FNRC recommendations for the FY2023 budget. As chair of the FNRC, I am, of course, delighted to answer any questions you or your staff may have.

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