

November 3, 2023

Honorable Christian Dorsey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: PRC – Forestry and Natural Resources Plan Letter

Dear Chair Dorsey,

The Arlington County Parks and Recreation Commission are pleased to provide praise and further guidance for the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan presented to you on October 14, 2023.

The FNRP is a major undertaking: combining the previous Urban Forest Master Plan and the Natural Resources Management Plan into a single plan and creating a new element of the Comprehensive Plan provides the County and residents with new vision and tools to support our parks, trees and urban ecology. With the enactment of the final plan, County decisions must, for the first time, consider the importance of our urban forests and natural resources as among the twelve most important components of the County's Comprehensive Plan. This includes both properly valuing the benefits provided by our green infrastructure and investing in its expansion, maintenance and preservation by treating it as "natural capital" in budgeting and other County decisions.

We are pleased that the Vision Statement was amended to acknowledge the importance of creating resilience in the face of climate change, a concept that should feature prominently in all County decisions.

The PRC concurs with the ten Priority Actions, especially the long-held goal of increasing County public space acquisitions, but notes that a critical step in achieving this goal will require the County to set aside considerable funding for land acquisition.

We are pleased that addressing tree canopy equity in underserved areas is a prominent goal as these areas are most impacted by the heat-island effect, and most boosted by investment in tree canopy and parks. The Section on funding for this initiative, however, in Section 4.5.4 lacks specifics. Funding needs will be high as persuading tree planting on private property is a labor intensive endeavor, and thousands of trees must be planted to close the equity gap.

The goal of enhancing development standards is laudable, and we remind you of the March 2022 letter sent by PRC, NRJAG and FNRC setting forth specific changes desired in the development standards to enhance and protect tree canopy and biophilia.

We are pleased that the large cadre of existing volunteers are recognized and plans are included to increase their numbers.

We are pleased that the FNRP specifically calls out the other parkland owning entities, NOVA Parks and the National Park Service (NPS) as well as focuses on Arlington Public School (APS) property in the description of Arlington's lands. Arlington County is a part owner of NOVA Parks and provides tax revenue to this entity

Commission Members

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each year. It is within the purview and responsibility of DPR to monitor and engage with NOVA Parks to ensure consistency of goals regarding invasive plant removal, stormwater retention policies, preservation of tree canopy and other important considerations. The suggestion in the FNRP to join the area PRISM and to enter into Memoranda of Understanding with NOVA Parks and NPS is a great step in the direction of ensuring all of Arlington's natural areas are cared for properly.

The inclusion of Biophilic elements in the FNRP is very welcome, especially the intention to adopt a native plant *requirement* in private developments as well as public ones. All of the invasive species management specifics are fully supported by the Commission, including the suggestion to use the capital budget to fund invasive plant removal efforts similar to a capital maintenance program in the built environment. Deer overabundance seriously threatens our natural environment, weakening our forests and the Commission strongly supports deer control as an invasive plant control method. The Commission strongly supports a County wide conservation and connectivity network, including small patches on private and unmanaged public land that can be addressed with volunteer efforts. Fostering biodiversity in the built environment is an important element of the FNRP including addressing light pollution and the use of bird friendly materials that reduce bird deaths during migration and other times.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input from the PRC. We would like to thank the dedicated staff that worked so hard to develop the FNRP, and to applaud their extensive public engagement effort that was extremely successful in eliciting public comments and improving the final product.

Sincerely,

Shruti Kuppa



Chair – Park and Recreation Commission

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