

December 11, 2024

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

RE: Gateway Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines

Dear Chair Garvey:

The Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) is pleased to submit this letter in support of adoption of the Gateway Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines. We would also like to highlight several areas to prioritize during the design development stage. Rosslyn is an urban location with limited expansive landscape opportunities. It is essential that we get it right when renovating the limited parkland and open space available in the Rosslyn neighborhood.

We would first like to commend the Gateway Park Project team for their excellent effort in engaging the public in plan development. This effort began in the spring of this year when the team provided the public with the opportunity to provide input on existing uses and conditions, followed by soliciting feedback on three draft concept design options, and then soliciting further feedback on the final design chosen. This effort was fully warranted. As the 2015 Rosslyn Sector Plan observed (page 38):

Rosslyn has become one of the most underserved areas in the County for active recreation and park space. Growing numbers of workers, residents, and visitors in and around Rosslyn will need more inspiring and welcoming public parks to maintain and improve Rosslyn's vital role as a regional attraction and place of community vitality and economic growth for Arlington.

The Rosslyn Sector Plan provides valuable guidance for judging the suitability of the proposed Gateway Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines. The Sector Plan's vision for Rosslyn is inspiring:

- *[F]uture Rosslyn will be an urban district that celebrates the experience of nature and recreation through its diverse network of public parks, open spaces, and tree-lined streets.*

Commission Members

Jill Barker, Chair
Gary Shinnars, Vice Chair
Erika Allen
Andrew Damitio
Nelson Dimpter
Daniel Garay
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- *Over time, the parks and open spaces will establish a new setting and position 21st century Rosslyn as a dynamic live/work/play environment strongly defined by its active public parks.*
- *Rosslyn will possess a well-balanced and connected urban open space system, featuring excellent connections to the surrounding regional and federal park systems. A comprehensive parks and open space system that promotes community health and well-being includes accessible public spaces for civic engagement and respite from the urban environment, for recreation opportunities and quality of life amenities, and for connective infrastructure linking these features throughout the network. This system can be achieved by enhancing and repurposing existing public open spaces in Central Rosslyn, while creating new spaces in strategic locations to complete a balanced network of public parks and open spaces. (Rosslyn Sector Plan page 124)*

In regard to tree canopy, the Rosslyn Sector Plan sets forth clear goals (page 151):

The new and revitalized parks and open spaces proposed for Rosslyn will be prime opportunities to increase tree canopy coverage, which today is approximately 5% within the RCRD. Combined with new street trees that will be planted as streetscapes are improved, the total tree canopy coverage should meet or exceed the County's goal of 15% for central business districts as outlined in the County's Urban Forest Master Plan (also see Sustainability section).

Of course, if the County is to meet or exceed the 15% tree canopy goal for Rosslyn, the tree canopy of the limited open space available in Rosslyn must far exceed that percentage to bring the overall average up to 15%.

With respect to amenities a revitalized Gateway Park should provide, the Rosslyn Sector Plan provides further specific guidance. Pursuant to the Plan, these amenities should include lawn area suitable for large public events and everyday use, a children's play area, an exercise/recreation area, stations for bicyclists and joggers, a canine area, and areas that provide opportunity for respite, socializing, transition, reflection, and connection to nature (Rosslyn Sector Plan pages 70, 127, 133). The renovation of Gateway Park should also include stormwater strategies such as green roofs, green walls, rainwater harvesting, and/or stormwater planters, pervious paving, infiltration tree pits, rain gardens, bioretention swales, and green roofs (Rosslyn Sector Plan page 74).

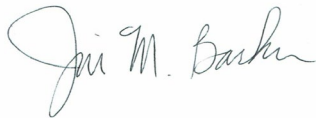
The Gateway Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines do a commendable job of capturing the vision for Gateway Park set forth in the Rosslyn Sector Plan, as well as containing most of the items that the Rosslyn Sector Plan states should be included in the revitalization. The Gateway Plan will create a well-balanced urban park that provides an opportunity to be in a relatively green setting thanks to tree lined paths throughout the park, a pollinator garden, and tree canopy coverage that is projected to eventually reach at least 40%. The Gateway Plan also provides active amenities such as a children's playground, dog parks for large and small dogs, exercise and recreation areas, bicycle stations, a lawn area suitable for large public events and smaller gatherings, an event pavilion, and public restrooms and storage.

While we are pleased by the Gateway Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines, we would like to point out several things that need to be prioritized during the design development stage. Most importantly, every effort should be made to maximize biophilia. The small area dedicated to a pollinator garden should be expanded to the extent possible in order to ensure that pollinators have a substantial area of native wildflowers and other native plants to visit and to improve the nature experience for park users. It is also imperative that the tree canopy be maximized to the fullest extent possible so that the park can make a meaningful contribution to Rosslyn's tree canopy coverage and to ensure that park is viewed as place where people can go to immerse themselves in nature and gain at least temporary respite from the urban environment. It will also be important to maximize opportunities for pervious paving, rain gardens, stormwater planters, bioretention swales, infiltration tree pits, and green walls and roofs. We look forward to being an active participant during the design and development stage.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Gateway Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines. We very much appreciate the great effort and thought that County Staff put forth and the expertise they brought to bear in its development.

Sincerely,

Jill Barker



Chair, Park and Recreation Commission

cc. Members, Arlington County Board

Mark Schwarz, Arlington County Manager

Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation