

May 1, 2024

Honorable Libby Garvey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Park and Recreation Commission Melwood Special GLUP Letter

Dear Chair Garvey,

The Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) was able to participate in the Long Range Planning Commission (LPRC) as part of the Planning Commission covering the request to change the GLUP designation from "Public" to "Low-Medium" Residential with an associated rezoning from C-1 and R-6 to RA8-18 for the subject properties located on 23rd Street South between South Hayes Street and South Grant Street.

Because the site is comprised of a portion of Nelly Custis Park (renovated in 2019) and is located within a block of Nina Park, we are happy that staff have paid special attention to the Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) and the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan (FNRP). While the parcel being considered is not identified for public access in the PSMP, "future development of this parcel should incorporate elements from the PSMP Design Guidelines to ensure an appropriate and sensitive transition can be established to the adjacent park which should minimize any potential negative impacts". Staff also noted that the FNRP calls for Arlington to "recommend a tree canopy of 25% for sites such as this. The FNRP also includes guidance for biophilic design on private property. This includes a discussion of how to successfully implement biophilic principles, biophilic design considerations for project designers, examples of successful projects in Arlington, and reference materials for project designers. This guidance should be consulted early in the design process to ensure the project successfully implements the principles of biophilic design and contributes to the conservation goals articulated in the FNRP."

The Parks and Recreation Commission highly supports these staff suggestions, and we would like to see the tree canopy goals exceeded (beyond 25%) with further species diversification and special attention to mature trees. As we think about the redevelopment of this property, the county will need to mitigate any potential adverse downstream stormwater impacts. This will involve additional inter-departmental coordination (likely with Facility Management and could include Arlington Public Schools) that should be accounted for as part of rezoning.

We also want to echo the comments of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association and the detailed study they have done on this project. They note that Nelly Custis Park already serves the greater South Arlington Community and any additional development in this region will further increase the demand for open public space. The proposed development plans in the Melwood Study Scenarios 1&2 do not allocate enough public open space to meet the demands of a new housing development, therefore further burdening Nelly Custis Park. The PRC recommends that any new development include additional park space (at minimum, a dog relief area) to meet the community's needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on this Special GLUP for Melwood and while we welcome the rezoning and upcoming housing development projects, we will continue to advocate for biophilia to be protected in this part of the county.

Sincerely,

Commission Members

Jill Barker, Chair
Gary Shinnars, Vice Chair
Nelson Dimpter
Dean Foster
Neal Hunter
Shruti Kuppa
Andreana Lin
Mark Lincoln
Claire Pascocello
Adam Rasmussen
Melissa Riggio
Alex (Boris) Sanders

Jill Barker
Chair – Park and Recreation Commission

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