

April 9, 2025

Honorable Takis P. Karantonis
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Park and Recreation Commission – Gulf Branch Stream Resilience Project

Dear Chair Karantonis,

The Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) respectfully provides these comments regarding the Gulf Branch Stream Resilience Project.

Like many Arlington County streams, Gulf Branch has been affected by excessive stormwater runoff due to a high percentage of impervious cover, such as roofs, roads and driveways, in its watershed. These impervious features block precipitation from slowly infiltrating into the ground, and instead, rain and snowmelt rush off into the stormwater system and then into Gulf Branch. The flooding from stormwater has caused substantial erosion in the stream and loss of habitat and is endangering infrastructure. Gulf Branch was identified as a high priority for a stream repair and resiliency project in Arlington's 2011 County-wide Stream Assessment.

The PRC recognizes the need for an in-stream project to protect the currently exposed sewer infrastructure and address the significant erosion affecting Gulf Branch. The Gulf Branch Stream Resilience Project has evolved since its beginnings, and we believe that it has improved substantially since 2019 when the first draft concept designs were released. There have been important changes to the project, and we appreciate staff's responsiveness to community concerns and recommendations. These include the inclusion of Green Streets below Military Road, the substitution of woody debris for gray infrastructure in Reach 2, and minimization of tree removal. We recognize that there are significant challenges at this site and that County staff have worked diligently to realize the goals of the project while remaining available to the public and responsive to its concerns.

Stream resiliency projects have had mixed results in the Mid-Atlantic region, and the need for such projects is an admission of the failure of the County and its residents to address stormwater runoff and its pollutants nearer to, or preferably, at their source. The PRC urges the County to redouble efforts to capture stormwater before it reaches the upper tributaries of Gulf Branch Stream. Since much of the stormwater originates on private property before being directed into the park, outreach to these property owners on stormwater capture and infiltration methods will be critical to reducing runoff before it enters our parks and tributaries and contributes to erosion.

Although there may be opportunities to install bioswales or other stormwater catchment approaches above the three tributaries of Gulf Branch, we believe that the project as currently designed should go forward. Additional green infrastructure can be added in separate projects, and preferably in concert with efforts to reduce runoff at its source. We support the Gulf Branch Stream Resilience Project and urge the County to proceed with implementation.

Commission Members

Jill Barker, Chair
Gary Shinnars, Vice
Chair
Erika Allen
Nelson Dimpter
Andrew Damitio
David Earley
Daniel Garay
Neal Hunter
Claire Pascocello
Adam Rasmussen
Melissa Riggio
Alex Sanders
William Way

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Jill M. Barker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jill" being the most prominent.

Jill M. Barker,
Chair – Park and Recreation Commission
cc: Members, Arlington County Board