ARLINGTON VIRGINIA

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Department of Parks and Recreation

2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 414, Arlington, VA 22201
Phone: 703 -228-7529
www.arlingtonva.us

June 1, 2026

Honorable Matt de Ferranti
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Capital Improvement Program, FY 2027-2036

Dear Chair de Ferranti,

The Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) reviewed the County Manager's proposed Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) dated May 19, 2026, for the ten fiscal years from FY 2027 to 2036 and provides the following comments and support. We look forward to further discussion and may update these comments as the CIP moves through the County Board's approval process.

Commission Members

William Way, Chair
Gary Shinners, Vice Chair
Erika Allen
Andrew Damitio
Nelson Dimpter
David Earley
Sara Hwong
Jeff Loftus
Adam Rasmussen
Melissa Riggio
Carly Rogers
Alex Sanders
Richard Viola

Overview

The proposed CIP has been structured to prioritize critical needs of existing assets. The PRC supports prioritization of existing parks and facility needs to maintain equitable access to and quality of community services and to restore natural habitat.

The PRC affirms its support for the strategic investments in FY 2027 and FY 2028 for major projects, including Rosslyn Gateway Park, the Potomac River Boathouse, Metro Square Park in Crystal City, and Drew Park.

Significant new funds are dedicated to improving the health of the County's 524 acres of natural lands in the Natural Resiliency and Habitat Restoration program, and the PRC enthusiastically endorses the proposal's treatment of our parkland and other natural areas as capital assets. This fresh and long-term funding provides hope that Arlington will eventually achieve control over non-native invasive plants that have decimated our parks and restore our natural areas to health. Although the proposed funding represents a substantial increase, the total remains well below the $1 million annual funding requested in PRC's letter to the Board dated 11/28/25, attached.

Staff have used improved asset inventories and community data to support decision-making. PRC applauds this data-driven approach and its application to the replacement of playgrounds and fields and supporting infrastructure such as HVAC and roofing systems.

Overall, the proposed CIP for local parks is $286 million, 10% below the prior plan reflecting completion of Kenmore's field conversion and other projects. Given the evident fiscal constraints and need to comply with adopted financial policies, the PRC generally supports the 10-year investment level but notes the potential for higher out-year requirements for heavily used facilities such as Quincy Park and Thomas Jefferson community center. While the PRC appreciates the discipline driving the 10% reduction in the overall park and recreation capital investment, we caution that prolonged capital constriction will stall our climate resiliency goals and catch us flat-footed as urban density increases.

The balance of this letter provides additional perspectives on several priority programs.

Critical Investment in Natural Capital

The PRC supports dedicating capital funds within the **Natural Resiliency & Habitat Restoration Program** for large-scale removal of non-native invasive plants and habitat restoration. We recognize that the goal of placing all County natural lands under active invasive-species management by FY 2033 means only that those acres will have received herbicide treatment —not that they will have recovered to healthy ecological condition. In fact, only a small number of parks currently under active management can reasonably be considered healthy. **To make meaningful progress toward restoring the County's natural lands, the PRC continues to recommend at least $1 million in annual funding for habitat restoration.** The proposed FY 2027 capital and operational funding is roughly half that amount.

Community priorities strongly reinforce this need. In the recently completed **2025/2026 Community Interest and Opinion Survey Findings Report**, natural areas and wildlife habitat rated:

- #2 in importance among all County park facilities (pg. vii),
- #2 in priority for investment in park amenities (pg. viii),
- #2 in need for park programs (pp. x, 53),
- #2 in need of facilities/amenities (pg. 52), and
- a Tier 1 Priority in all categories (page vii).

Maintaining these assets is also fiscally prudent. Replacing 500 acres of parkland at current real-estate prices would likely exceed $1 billion, and the 2016 Tree Canopy Survey estimates the value of Arlington's trees alone at more than $1 billion. As population density increases, these natural areas will only grow more valuable. We therefore endorse the County manager's proposal to treat parkland as natural capital eligible for bond-funded maintenance.

Reliable, multi-year funding for land management will yield substantial returns, including improved climate resilience, reduced flood risk, enhanced physical and mental health benefits, and more vibrant, biophilic neighborhoods. **Effective restoration requires both invasive-species removal and immediate replanting with native species; without the latter, invasives will quickly reclaim treated areas.** Planning and budgeting must account for both components.

The PRC also endorses the proposed new staff position to support habitat restoration. Currently, only two employees manage the Native Plant Nursery and restoration work across 147 parks—totaling 942 acres—plus 126 acres of natural resource conservation areas. This staffing level is insufficient to meet the County's restoration goals. Additional capacity is essential to restoring the ecological health of Arlington's natural areas.

Strategic Investments in Master Planned Parks and Facilities

The PRC enthusiastically supports advancing **Gateway Park** construction over the next 3 to 4 years, consistent with the adopted master plan, to revitalize a beloved public space into a more vibrant and welcoming hub for a wide range of users in the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor.

Following 15 years of targeted land acquisition, the County is finalizing the master plan for **Drew Park**. PRC supports the proposed funding for final site design and construction of the new park which will create a larger, more connected community space in Green Valley.

The area around the new Crystal City Metrorail station entrance at 18th Street South and Crystal Drive offers a significant opportunity to create a vibrant, flexible urban public space. The PRC supports prioritizing the **Crystal City–Metro Market Square** project and the FY 2027–28 funding allocation. Strengthening open-space amenities in Crystal City is particularly important given community needs and delays to the Center Park expansion caused by the recently approved adaptive-reuse project.

Funding is also provided for implementation of Phase 2 of the **Penrose Square Park** Master Plan, to extend the features from the previous phase into the western portion of the public square. Phase 2 has

accelerated to begin design in 2028 with construction estimated to begin in 2030. PRC supports the proposed funding and timeline.

The **Potomac River Boathouse** is one of the few new facilities in the proposed CIP. With master planning consultant procurement now underway, PRC strongly supports timely completion of the master planning and design phases to permit the construction of the boathouse on the Lower Rosslyn Site to begin before the project's partnership agreement expires in 2029.

Achieving the County's Public Space Goals

Arlington's citizens identified park land acquisition as a high priority in the recent engagement survey and the **Land Acquisition Program** is proposed at $15.5 million, up $1.7 million from the prior plan. PRC notes favorably the long-term increase in funding for land acquisition and is cautiously optimistic it will support timely acquisition of the five acres needed to fulfill the Public Spaces Master Plan's (PSMP) goal to add 30 acres to the County's park and public space inventory.

The PRC notes that rapid escalation in urban land values and intensive redevelopment corridors – such as Langston Boulevard and National Landing – could erode the purchasing power of the $15.5 million over the term of the plan. We urge the County to act aggressively and opportunistically within the next two years to secure the remaining five acres before rising land prices put critical high-density neighborhoods out of reach.

Ensuring Safety of Synthetic Turf Fields

Arlington has invested in synthetic turf fields to meet demand for athletic facilities that support a wide range of programs and drop-in use. The proposed CIP allocates $23.7 million over 10 years to continue the replacement of 20 synthetic turf fields on the cycle required to ensure user safety. The PRC supports the near-term priorities for FY 2027 and FY 2028 – Long Bridge Park fields #1 and #4 and Gunston's rectangular and diamond fields – and sustained application of the 8 to 10-year replacement cycle across all synthetic fields.

Maintaining our Recreational and Transportation Networks

PRC is pleased the County is investing in its trails and bridges used by pedestrians and cyclists for both recreation and transportation. The **Trail and Bridge Modernization Program**, another high resident priority, is funded at $15 million over 10 years, down 25% from $20 million in the prior plan, reflecting a reduction in bridge major maintenance backlog due to recent completion of six park and trail bridges. Future bridge and ford replacements needed in the FY 2027 – 2036 timeframe will be identified based on new assessments and inspections beginning in 2027.

Protecting Existing Park Assets

The PRC concurs that maintaining existing assets should remain a CIP priority, and we are pleased to see $58 million allocated to the **Park Maintenance Capital Program** – virtually unchanged from the prior plan. We applaud Staff's use of project bundling and strategies such as prefabricated buildings to reduce the major-maintenance backlog. The proposed equipment-replacement funding is essential to maintaining a State of Good Repair, ensuring operational safety for staff and patrons, and preventing compounding maintenance deficits across our 147 parks and associated facilities.

Important Major Maintenance for Community Centers

Several community centers require HVAC and roof replacements, and the CIP provides funding in FY 2027 and FY 2028 for projects at Madison, Walter Reed, and Fairlington. PRC understands the importance of these projects and supports the upgrades needed to maintain the important community services these centers provide.

Longer-Term Priorities and Deferral Risks

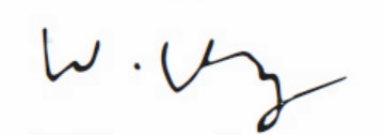
The highly utilized 18-acre **Quincy Park** is the only major park of its kind in the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor, the focus of significant past and future growth. The need to master plan the park and to address its maintenance capital needs has been well known for a decade but often deferred due to funding constraints. The proposed CIP includes $38 million in FY 2030-2034 for park improvements starting with a comprehensive planning process in FY 2030, to include Central Library, to develop options that could be delivered over multiple years. PRC recognizes the importance of this park and supports the proposed CIP timeline and financial plan.

The **Thomas Jefferson Community Center, Fitness Space, and Gym** are also among the county's most heavily utilized facilities. Arlington Public School's CIP includes a renovation and addition to Thomas Jefferson Middle School beginning in FY 2028-2029. The County's proposed CIP includes a preliminary placeholder of $3 million in 2029 for renovation of the shared used facilities with expectations this will increase significantly in the next CIP. The PRC agrees it is appropriate to consider improvements needed to the joint-use spaces while the entire TJ building is under construction. The PRC would endorse increasing the placeholder, if possible, during the CIP adoption process.

We appreciate the hard work and dedication evidenced by this proposed CIP. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

William Way,



Chair – Park and Recreation Commission

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

Attachment: PRC Budget Guidance Letter to the Board (Nov. 18, 2025)

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November 18, 2025

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

Re: Suggested Budget Guidance - Invasive Plant Removal and Restoration

Dear Chair Karantonis,

The Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) requests that the County Board acknowledge the billions of dollars[1] that Arlington's natural land provides in financial and intangible benefits to County residents each year, by requesting the County Manager to include the following in the FY2026 operating and capital budgets:

a) continued annual operating budget funding for invasive plant removal and native plant work in Arlington County parks at or above the level of FY2025; and

b) expanded and redirection of the $1.5 million funding in the Capital Improvement Plan (capital budget) under the Natural Resiliency Program to invasive plant removal and native planting projects.

The PRC recommends that the County consistently allocate approximately $1 million per year to restoring and preserving all of Arlington's natural land spread across both the operating budget and in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The current funding approach for preservation of Arlington's natural areas is untenable.

Despite more than ten years of funding and the heroic efforts of the very small but dedicated, talented and determined Arlington County Staff as well as the contribution of thousands of volunteer hours, our natural Arlington County lands are not close to being restored. Outside contractor herbicide treatments for parks greater than three acres is the centerpiece of the County's program, but herbicide application will only work in the context of a more comprehensive strategy that includes hand pulling, volunteer and County Staff applied herbicide treatment, and aggressive native plant restoration. Although 67% of the larger parks have received some sort of herbicide treatment, almost all lands still harbor significant invasive species. With few exceptions none of the lands would be considered restored to a healthy status with native plant species proliferating.

[1] According to the Public Spaces Master Plan, the value of our County-owned public spaces, even without any structures or improvements, is estimated at over $5 billion, and a County report on the 2016 Tree Canopy Survey estimated the value of just our trees at $1.4 billion. Natural areas provide an impressive array of benefits from promotion of mental and physical health, increased community cohesion, storm water management, climate mitigation/heat reduction, reduction of air and water pollution, and enhancement of biodiversity.

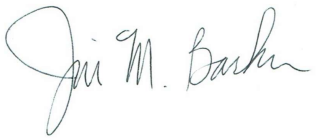
As of today, approximately one third of larger-park natural land has never been treated with herbicide, or consistently received any other method of invasive plant removal, and is not expected to commence treatment until 2028, including the newly acquired 6.7-acre Pimmit Run land. At the current pace of adding 30 acres per year to herbicide treatment, the last of the 543 larger-park acreage will not be in management until 2034, about 22 years after the program started, and the smaller parks and parcels will be left to fend for themselves until sometime thereafter, if ever. None of the parks previously treated is expected to be "finished" since all are slated for some form of herbicide at least through 2032.

The County Board provided $100,000 per year in the Operating Budget to support the non-native invasive species management program beginning in 2012, and "one-time" increased funds were provided in FY2024 and FY2025. The "one-time" funds were used to "suppress" non-native plants in areas never treated, while some of the previously treated areas were moved to "maintenance". In addition, the County Board's CIP included $3.5 million in FY 2024 for "Natural Resiliency Program", which was reduced to $1.5 million in FY2026. This funding was described as for (in part) "large-scale invasive plant removal projects", but no such projects were undertaken.[2]

Allowing invasive plants to proliferate on our natural park land is akin to ignoring a leaking roof. The issue needs to be addressed comprehensively and aggressively up front through capital funds, combined with a significant maintenance program that incorporates all the essential elements, such as those that are laid out in the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan and detailed in the following Appendix.

For a relatively modest additional investment of less than 0.02% of the value of benefits these lands provide, the County can greatly accelerate restoration. Although these are difficult economic times, urgent commitment by the County is necessary to reverse the degradation of Arlington's precious natural asset by funding it in a fundamentally different way.

Sincerely yours,



Jill M. Barker, Chair – Park and Recreation Commission

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

[2] As of the summer of 2025, only approximately $1 million of this funding was spent or allocated at all, and none of it was spent on large-scale invasive plant removal projects.

APPENDIX
SUPPORT FOR SUGGESTED BUDGET GUIDANCE FOR
INVASIVE PLANT REMOVAL AND RESTORATION PLANTING

The Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) shares the concerns of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) about the inadequate and inconsistent funding of the County's program to restore and preserve the 543 acres of natural land owned by the County. This land provides financial benefits to Arlington County's residents in the billions of dollars, as well as tremendous unquantifiable benefits. Although these are difficult economic times, urgent commitment by the County is necessary to reverse the degradation of Arlington's precious natural asset by funding it in a fundamentally different way. The PRC recommends that the County consistently allocate both operational funding and capital funding of at least a combined $1 million per year to restore and preserve our natural lands. The letter to which this Appendix is attached is intentionally provided well in advance of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget cycle to encourage everyone to recognize our natural land for the value it provides to the County.

The Current Funding Approach for Preservation of Arlington's Natural Areas is Untenable.

The PRC appreciates the operating budget funding that the County Board provided to support the non-native invasive species management program beginning in 2012, and especially appreciates the "one-time" increased funds that were provided in FY 2024 and FY 2025. The PRC supports the FNRC's recommendation, however, that there be consistent annual funding for invasive plant removal and other restoration work. The current approach to funding must be expanded to also include a capital budget component for the County to succeed in restoring and preserving the health of our parks and other natural areas.

As pointed out in the FNRC's July 25, 2025, budget letter to the Board, this one-year-at-a-time funding approach in the operating budget was not adjusted to keep up with inflation and was not consistent. Further, these funds were used solely to pay for the spraying of non-native invasive plants by an outside contractor and were not used for manual removal or any other efforts to remove non-native invasive plants that are an essential component of restoration work. Although in Arlington's 543 acres of natural land herbicide was applied to some non-native invasive plants in about 2/3 of the acreage, in only a very few cases would anyone consider those natural areas to be restored to a healthy status. The funding was also not used for the planting of native plants, which should immediately follow the removal of non-native invasive plants to prevent the return of invasives. The current funding level and *ad hoc* approach is fundamentally inadequate to drive comprehensive results.

Despite the lack of funding, some progress in restoring our parkland has been made thanks to skilled Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) staff assisted by strong volunteer support.

- Two outstanding DPR employees oversee the County's invasive removal program, run the County's Native Plant Nursery, and manage the restoration program. Neither has staff to help carry out their managerial duties. Even with talented personnel like these employees, expecting only two employees to manage restoration and preservation of 543 acres, operate the County nursery, and cover a myriad of other responsibilities is unrealistic.

- Arlington County is very fortunate to cooperate with several non-profit environmental organizations whose members provided thousands of hours of volunteer time over the years to combat non-native invasive plants and assist with native plantings in our parks: Arlington Regional Master Naturalists (ARMN), Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, and the Tree Stewards of Arlington and Alexandria. ARMN members also importantly provide the County with volunteer Park Stewards who periodically organize and supervise invasive removal and planting volunteer events at slightly less than 30 of our approximately 150 parks. ARMN valiantly attempts to tap all possible sources of volunteers by enlisting the help of volunteers from other non-profit organizations, corporations, schools, religious institutions, scout troops, and even those individuals who the County has ordered to earn community service hours because they committed various driving infractions. As helpful as these volunteers are, the PRC Commissioners who also serve as Park Stewards attest that even the relatively few parks that are privileged to have Park Steward leadership do not have sufficient volunteer and other essential resources necessary to restore those parks' natural areas to health.

What Success Could Look Like.

Success in revitalizing our natural areas can provide huge benefits to our population and County. The advantages include increased natural resilience protecting property from flooding and climate change effects; increased physical and mental health benefits from connecting our citizens to biodiverse natural areas; more beautiful and biophilic neighborhoods; and a better educated population that appreciates the value of natural areas and living in a healthier fashion. Arlington could serve as a national standard of improving nature in a vibrant urban area.

Success will require funding a broader set of activities led by the county, and an even more essential role for volunteers, as articulated in the recently adopted Forestry and Natural Resources Plan (FNRP). Efforts such as coordinating better with private property owners near parks to remove invasive plants; comprehensive surveying of our natural areas to understand where approaches are working in the broader goals of natural lands restoration and where they are not; coordination with other governmental jurisdictions that manage large properties, such as the National Park Service and the

Virginia Department of Transportation; and, of course, working with Arlington County Schools will help restore our natural areas, while also dovetailing with the goals of the FNRP.

Success will also require adapting how the County uses Invasive Plant Contractors (IPC). Most of the funds allocated by the County to date paid for commercial eradication efforts conducted by IPCs. Application of herbicide is an essential tool in combating invasive plants, but it is not a comprehensive answer. A much greater on-the-ground understanding of each natural area must be developed and communicated to IPCs, along with a set of best practices to integrate herbicide application with other techniques and volunteer support. Better yet, County staff assisted by trained volunteers intimately familiar with our parks could take over the application of herbicide.

All in all, for a relatively modest additional investment compared to the value of services these lands provide, the County can greatly accelerate restoration, especially if the County compliments operational funds with capital funds in restoring these natural areas with planned, sustained, consistent, and adequate funding. Gone are the days when untamed lands will "take care of themselves" with a little mowing and occasional pruning near the edges. These natural assets provide tangible benefits that will vanish without a much higher level of commitment from the County.

Our Natural Areas Greatly Benefit Arlington County and Should be Adequately Funded Through Capital Funds as well as Operational Funds.

Our parks are precious assets that provide a wealth of benefits that deserve to be protected at least as much as the County protects gray infrastructure through the capital budget.

> Trees, natural areas, wildlife and plants are invaluable County ***capital assets*** and should be funded and planned for as such. . . . Economic and social value multiplies as natural assets mature, and care must be taken to conserve the services they provide over their lifecycle.
>
> Adequate funding is a key step in ensuring these services. While capital budgeting typically is aimed at sequestering funds that will be needed to replace gray infrastructure at the end of its useful life, it can also provide an avenue for funding the development of green infrastructure, another vital community asset.

FNRP, Section 4.5.1(emphasis supplied). The great benefits that our natural areas provide Arlington County residents are succinctly stated in the FNRP's first two principles (page 12):

1. Natural ecosystems support human health and vibrant communities. Trees, native plants and natural places provide measurable benefits to our residents and visitors. They help improve air and water quality,

human wellbeing and public health; and provide beauty, environmental and economic benefits, wildlife habitat, food, and places for families and others to gather.

2. Nature is valuable in and of itself. It provides priceless ecological services, many of which we imperfectly understand. Nature is a source of aesthetic gratification and spiritual inspiration — and the deep wellspring of genetic diversity that guarantees future evolution and adaptation.

Natural areas provide an impressive array of benefits from promotion of mental and physical health, increased community cohesion, storm water management, climate mitigation/heat reduction, reduction of air and water pollution, and enhancement of biodiversity.

Classic economic benefits are also provided such as, for example, enhanced real estate values enjoyed by property located adjacent to or near a park. A full list of benefits provided by our natural areas is set forth in Appendix A, Nature Matters, of the FNRP (pages 144-148). According to the Public Spaces Master Plan, the value of our County-owned public spaces, even without any structures or improvements, is estimated at over $5 billion, and a County report on the 2016 Tree Canopy Survey estimated the value of just our trees at $1.4 billion.

Our parks are understandably considered among the very top features that make our urban community an extremely attractive place to live. One need only imagine what Arlington would be like without our parks to appreciate how devastating the loss of our natural areas would have on the livability of Arlington. As we strive to increase the population density of Arlington our parks will become even more precious. We are very fortunate indeed to have had County leaders over the years with the wisdom to reserve so many acres as parkland and other natural areas.

The FY 2019-2028 CIP (pages 7- 8) specifically provides that “[c]apital assets include land, facilities, parks, playgrounds and outdoor structures,” and further provides that “capital expenditures” are those that will “enhance, acquire, or extend the useful life of the asset” and includes “asset rehabilitation.” The County has in fact already provided capital funding for habitat restoration work including, among other activities, invasive removal and planting of natives, through the Natural Resiliency Program, which is part of the CIP. What is needed is a dedication of funds from the Natural Resiliency Program sufficient in combination with operating funds to adequately support our efforts to restore our natural lands.

Practical Recommendations to Move Forward.

The PRC recommends that the Board approve an operational budget and capital budget that provide in combination at least $1 million per year for our natural area

restoration/preservation program, with annual increases to address inflation and other challenges that arise in protecting Arlington's natural lands. These funds would be used, in part, for the following:

- Addition of several staff positions to support fully the County's habitat restoration/preservation program.
- Training of program staff.
- Purchase and upkeep of equipment, tools, and other supplies for habitat work.
- Outside contractor services for herbicide treatment of non-native invasive plants, transitioning to a program using County staff assisted by skilled and trained volunteers intimately familiar with our parks to provide herbicide management activities.

Enough additional staff should be hired to perform the following activities already set forth in the FNRP, but which will also enhance the County's commitment to preserving natural areas by removing invasive plants and planting natives:

- Develop and implement restoration/preservation plans of action for each park and natural area, consulting where appropriate with Park Stewards, neighborhood level citizen groups and adjoining landowners.
- Enlist the support of landowners whose property adjoins parkland and provide them with support in transforming their property into healthy natural habitats, thereby effectively expanding the positive impact of County natural habitats.
- Conduct periodic biophilia inventories, monitor and measure flora and fauna in our natural areas, establish biodiversity goals that are outcome oriented and track the County's progress toward meeting those goals, and enlist and train more residents to participate in monitoring. (FNRP Sections 4.1, 4.1.6, 4.1.7).
- Conduct surveys on high-impact organisms and existing/emerging pests to inform management on whether otherwise desirable species can drive ecosystem change and negatively impact natural resource goals, and on whether invasive species, pests, and diseases imperil the survival of desired species. (FNRP Section 4.1.8)
- Develop and enhance partnerships with independent entities to help provide and enhance the County's existing services by sharing resources and best habitat restoration practices and create with such entities integrated trail systems and wildlife corridors. Codify mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities with these entities through memoranda of understanding. (FNRP Sections 4.2, 4.2.3).
- Strengthen coordination with partner organizations and improve information sharing and joint planning to maximize the impact of volunteer efforts. Support and expand the capacity of partner organizations to coordinate recruitment, training, and mobilization of volunteers, create systems to track activity and measure success, assess the needs of existing volunteer organizations, and use that assessment to inform future initiatives. Develop position descriptions for volunteer work, create additional awards tied to specific types of volunteer work, and explore ways to track and acknowledge/reward private property owners that

create and/or steward natural resources on their properties. (FNRP Sections 4.3, 4.3.1, 4.3.3, 4.3.4).
- Identify biodiversity, natural infrastructure, and natural area connectivity opportunities on underutilized or unplanned public lands regardless of ownership, including unused areas on Arlington Public School and Virginia Department of Transportation property, among others, that can be used to create natural habitats that support our native plants and wildlife, and provide educational opportunities for those who come into contact with such property. (FNRP Section 3.3.3).
- Coordinate with Arlington Public Schools opportunities to bring education involving our native plants and wildlife into the classroom, and opportunities to bring students into the parks to learn about our natural environment. Seek out deeper engagements with the community, particularly those constituents who typically may not hear about or seek out information on natural resources. (FNRP Section 4.2).
- Work with other County departments whose work impacts natural resources by assisting in the development of best management practices to promote environmentally friendly and beneficial practices that will avoid tree removal where possible and support urban forests, wetlands, vernal pools, pest management, invasive species control, and stormwater management. (FNRP Section 4.6.3).

Moreover, supplementing the funds provided by the operational budget with funds from the capital budget would streamline attraction of outside funding to the effort. If a fund were to be established at the Community Foundation, for example, explicitly for the benefit of invasive plant removal and native plant restoration, such could attract individual donations, grants and perhaps even donations from developers seeking to provide community benefits in exchange for increased density.

Summary:

Arlington's natural areas are an invaluable asset that will be lost without greater attention. They deserve protection every bit as much as sports fields, playgrounds, and public restrooms. The metaphorical "roof" over our biodiversity is leaking badly and needs replacement at least as urgently as the roof of the Madison Center, for example. It is not just defensible or sensible, it is wise to provide for our natural resources commensurate with their true value to our wellbeing. The one million per year proposed by the PRC for protecting Arlington's natural areas is the minimum amount necessary to adequately fund the habitat restoration/preservation program and to make any real progress in implementing the action items in the FNRP. To put it into perspective, one million dollars is less than the amount that the County is scheduled to spend replacing the Fire Station #5 Bay Door (See FY 2025 CIP at page C-72).

Despite the troubling economic climate, our natural areas must receive urgent, substantial attention from the County. Making a paradigm shift in the approach to funding our natural area restoration/preservation program will facilitate comprehensive

preservation of our natural areas for posterity. The future of our natural areas depends on County stewardship, and the County must mature its funding priorities in line with the evolving appreciation of the benefits that our natural areas provide to Arlingtonians. The PRC calls upon the Board to build upon the legacy of earlier Board Members who reserved hundreds of acres of natural habitat for the benefit of all Arlington residents.