

ARLINGTON COUNTY
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 414
Arlington, Virginia 22201

March 16, 2021

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

RE: 2022 Budget

Dear Chair de Ferranti:

The Park and Recreation Commission PRC has reviewed summaries of the Manager's proposed budget for FY 2022 and would like to provide the following comments.

We appreciate the challenges that the county is facing fiscally and generally support the proposed budget submitted for the Department of Parks and Recreation. We applaud the extensive adjustment to DPR programs that has taken place over the past year. Notably, the on-line information for at home and outdoor recreational activities for families and innovative sports programs were impressive. We also note the efforts of DPR employees, including assistance with food distribution and DPR's opening of community centers for vaccinations.

We would also like to urge consideration for increased resources to support the natural amenities and facilities in Arlington Parks. One area of concern is reductions, albeit temporary, in staff levels for maintenance of park features such as landscapes, athletic fields, natural spaces, and facilities—all which provide the community with safe, enjoyable, and sustainable public spaces. As you know, in recent months, the increased use of the parks and trails from hiking, biking, and stream wading have resulted in sometimes severe ecological impacts. This impact is on top of recent storm damage to park amenities and facilities, as well as damage to forests and natural habitat from excessive deer browse. We continue to endorse the repair and upkeep of our parks, as well as funding for deer management to preserve native habitat. We endorse the Manager's past statements that his first priorities in an improved fiscal situation would be to restore funding in park maintenance.

Members of the Arlington community will welcome the opening of the Lubber Run and Long Bridge facilities, which will provide a variety of recreational and athletic opportunities for a diverse set of residents. We continue to support continued pursuit of planning and progress on other Public Space Master Plan priorities such as the updated tennis facility at Bluemont Park. The capital maintenance funds for Barcroft, Rocky Run, and Thomas Jefferson Upper will help continue non-programmed use of playing fields in neighborhoods that particularly need them.

However, we do wonder if some lengthening of synthetic field renovation schedules, subject to user safety considerations, would alleviate pressures on other DPR and county budget decisions.

The proposed cuts to the Virginia Extension contribution would have significant effects on its various programs, which include the Master Gardeners, Master Naturalist and 4-H programs. We note that the significant voluntary contributions of Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists to the beauty and sustainability of Arlington Parks is reflected by their dominant role as winners of the Commission's Bill Thomas Award. Extension has worked with county staff to enhance urban agriculture programs in in the county. And the 4-H programs have provided nature education and recreational opportunities for youthful members of our lower income neighborhoods.

On the proposal to cut the NVCT funding, over the last two decades it has protected thousands of acres in our immediate region. In Arlington, NVCT has 33 conservation easement protected properties, owns five parcels within its borders, and continues to work with the county that admittedly has limited open space opportunities, to conserve its open spaces. The county's yearly contributions to the organization enable NVCT not only to continue to conserve new areas of Arlington but also helps cover NVCT expenses in maintaining the land they already conserved for us in the county. The board should not only continue to fund NVCT but should also work to expand tax credits to private property owners that put their land in conservation easement, especially as we see more density being built on our horizon.

Sincerely,



William Ross
Chair, Park and Recreation Commission

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