

Friends of Arlington Parks

October 2015

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Special election edition

Environmental Forum for County Board Candidates in Oct 2015

Candidates for Arlington County Board have had several occasions to weigh in on park issues. The Arlington Parks Coalition published online candidate responses to questions about protecting and funding our parks (see below). In addition, four county environmental organizations hosted a candidate's forum on park and green-space issues in October. The sponsoring organizations were Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment, Arlington Parks Coalition, Tree Stewards of Arlington/Alexandria, and Arlington Regional Master Naturalists.

Friends of Arlington Parks was there and recorded the forum on video, which can be seen by going to our website, www.foap.org or by going directly to the YouTube video at:

<http://tinyurl.com/parks-forum>.



County Board Candidates Respond to Written Questions about Parks

Here are the responses to the written questions. They can be found organized by author at the Arlington Parks Coalition website. These responses are grouped by question and listed in alphabetical order of candidate's last name.

2015 Elections
Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2015
Polls are open 6am – 7pm

Question 1: Although the County Board is no longer pursuing last year's "Public Land for Public Good" initiative, it is anticipated that the Community Facilities Study Committee will develop a public facilities siting process which could potentially result in the use of our parkland and community center sites for other purposes.

a. Do you support the potential use of County parkland or community center sites for housing? for schools? for other purposes? AND

b. If elected to the Board, would you support the issuance of an overriding Board policy that our County parkland and community center sites should not be used for housing? for school sites? for other purposes?

Clement: I oppose the use of County parkland for housing, schools or any other purpose. The County has lost forty percent of its tree canopy since 1980, and as the most densely populated County in the U.S., it can't afford to sacrifice anymore.

The County already HAS an overriding Board policy adopted in 2010 that mandates no net loss of County owned natural land, called the Natural Resources Management Plan, which is attached. If elected I will propose an ordinance that bars the use of parkland for any development purpose including housing and schools.

Cristol: I believe the role of a County Board member is to do his or her best to balance all interests and needs in the community. Our County Board's responsibility is to stand in for the thousands of Arlington parents who feel as passionately about their neighborhood park as they do that their child shouldn't have to learn in a relocatable classroom. In order to do so, County Board members have to be able to thoughtfully evaluate data and projections and community input from all sides. Making categorical commitments to particular uses for particular sites makes it difficult to effectively take these steps and think holistically and innovatively while on the Board.

Please know that I would have the exact same answer for a developer, for an APS interest group, or any other stakeholder group regarding land use in Arlington.

All green space has value, and there is no "free land" in Arlington. In balancing competing interests for a given site, I will always consider the loss of green, park or open space as a cost to the community - and make decisions accordingly.

Dorsey: Parkland and community centers are already public goods, and should be considered public necessities. I do not support, on any level, repurposing parkland, or community centers within their useful lives for other purposes if it does not, at minimum maintain their existing uses. As our County becomes denser, the impact is not limited to housing and schools; the need for parks, recreation and open space grows accordingly.

I do not believe that is the best approach. In order to meet the multiple needs we have within our limited footprint, some creativity and flexibility are required. As was the case with Arlington Mill Community

Center, housing and an expanded community center with outdoor recreation space were added to public land. This “win-win” scenario would not have been pursued under the type of overriding policy assumed in this question.

To be clear, however, it should be an overriding Board practice that only “win-wins, that are shaped through a transparent and inclusive process of community input and feedback should lead to repurposing park and community center sites. See also response to Question 2 below.

McMenamin: No, I do not support using County parkland or community center sites for housing, schools or other purposes. We have a limited amount of Green Space in the County and I would make the preservation, maintenance and enhancement of our parks a priority.

Land is becoming more expensive and harder to find in the county, so once park space is taken for other uses it will never be replaced. I would also work to ensure that a portion of the Quincy Street property that the county just purchased would be used for Green Space.

If elected, I will commit to finding more creative ways to deal with school expansion and affordable housing needs that will not take away from our County’s limited amount of parklands. For instance, we should look to expand our schools by building them up instead of out and providing swing space for students until these projects are finished, e.g. use of the Edison site. In so doing, we would preserve the surrounding lands around the schools for play and activities.

Question 2: Given our County’s continuing dramatic population growth and already crowded parks and recreation resources, do you support increasing our parkland and recreation resources sufficient to meet not only current but also future demands on these resources?, If so, what specific steps would you advocate as a Board member to accomplish this increase, including any new and innovative funding mechanisms or other programs or tools?



Clement: As a long time environmental activist I definitely support further acquisition of parkland. Thus I was appalled to learn that in 2013 County Board negotiated a secret deal with Penzance to sell a County owned park next to Wilson School to a private developer, Penzance, in return for a promise to rebuild Fire Station #10. Not only is this a bad deal for the County, it’s a bad deal for Penzance, considering that the office vacancy rate in Rosslyn is 30 percent. If elected I promise to lobby to scuttle this deal, and put a stop to any other non-transparent agreements with developers.

Cristol: We must creatively expand green space in Arlington. Looking only at the 2.2 square miles of current County- and APS-owned land is too narrow a frame - and inherently pits schools against parks against affordability. For me, being a champion for parks and green space on the County Board means expanding the pie instead of fighting over slices:

Continuing (and seeking to increase) our strategic acquisition of land to expand neighborhood parks; Looking for creative, recreational uses of otherwise unusable sites; Cooperating with current landholders willing to convert their underutilized space for open space and recreational purposes; and Upgrading parks so they can be used more frequently than they currently are.

Dorsey: Yes, I support enhancing and expanding our park and recreation resources and increasing funding to satisfy that commitment. I do not support funding increases for parks and recreation through dedicated sales taxes (regressive), or increased user fees beyond those necessary to cover programming’s true costs. That leaves a number of other options that taken together hold promise for meeting our current demand and future needs:

- Developer contributions dedicated to parks and recreation resources
- Fully utilizing approved bonds, understood to be for park acquisition, for their intended purposes
- Exploring new forms like vertical gardens, and new places, like sub and above surface locations to expand both green space and recreation opportunities
- Using our external value capture instruments like tax increment financing and business improvement districts to generate steady funding streams beyond general funds
- Exploring how conservancies and philanthropies can become more integrated with our plans for land acquisition, and/or ongoing operations.

McMenamin: Initially, I would focus on the parkland that we have today. For years, I made recommendations to the county on the budget as a member of the Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee. Every year, parks were under funded, but the fees to use them for recreation and sporting events continued to climb. To me, parks are a core government priority that should be maintained, enhanced and expanded in instances that make fiscal sense, so that our parks sufficiently meet our recreational needs.

Question 3: In the decade prior to the 2009 recession, the County Board approved multiple parkland acquisition bonds in amounts of at least \$8 million each, which were used to acquire key parks and open space including Fort C.F. Smith



Park, Long Bridge Park and Powhatan Springs Skatepark. Given the dramatic increase in the cost of land in Arlington, as a Board member would you support a 2016 Park Bond measure, and subsequent park bond measures, of at least \$8 million each?

Clement: As both an environmental advocate and a fiscal conservative, I support the issuance of bonds for more park acquisition provided commensurate savings are found elsewhere in the budget. I would look for those savings in the County and School Board's bloated capital budgets. Arlington definitely doesn't need an aquatics center with three Olympic size pools. It also doesn't need to spend twice as much as Alexandria to construct new schools.

Cristol: I believe Park Bonds are an appropriate and strategic way to finance these sorts of acquisitions and capital upgrades.

Dorsey: That is a reasonable bond figure for 2016 and the foreseeable future. As a general principle, I want to analyze our fiscal conditions and acquisition opportunities on a contemporaneous basis, so I am not prepared now to make specific dollar commitments in the "out" years. To be clear, acquisition is a priority, not just when resources are abundant.

McMenamin: Given the County's current spending for capital projects, it would not seem unreasonable to support an \$8 Million Dollar bond. I would, however, want to know the full details on how the money would be spent. In addition, if elected I would ensure that the bonding language specifically stated what the money would be used for, unlike today.

Question 4: Do you oppose siting a new elementary school on the Thomas Jefferson site (bounded by S. Old Glebe Rd., S. 2nd St., S. Irving St., and Arlington Blvd./Route 50)? Do you support Arlington County developing a long-term plan for the Thomas Jefferson site that maintains the current acreage of Thomas Jefferson Park and improves the park's active and passive recreational space?

Clement: A new elementary school anywhere on the premises of T.J. Park is out of the question due to traffic congestion alone. What is needed is a completely renovated and expanded middle school that does not encroach on the park.

In general I advocate additions and renovations over new schools to preserve the County's environmental footprint. If sufficient elementary classroom space cannot be found elsewhere in South Arlington for that purpose, then APS should do as Fairfax County did and convert vacant office space along the Pike or Crystal City for use as classrooms.

Cristol: Did not directly address this question but did comment on the public process for addressing these issues (see question #5 response below).

Dorsey: I do not oppose it in absolute terms. As I noted in question one, if there is a way to at least preserve, and ideally enhance park, recreation and open space resources at the site while locating a new building there—provided that externalities like traffic and environmental impact are addressed appropriately—that can constitute a “win-win” scenario.

I do support planning to improve TJ Park's current uses and to improve access. While a useful metric, maintaining square footage is not the only barometer I use to gauge enhancement to public spaces. Design, configuration and calculations of usable and useful open space are very important in determining a space's value.

McMenamin: I oppose siting a new elementary school on the Thomas Jefferson site. I support the County developing a long-term plan for the Thomas Jefferson site that maintains and improves the park. While my kids played lacrosse on the Thomas Jefferson fields, I would run in the park. To me the Green Space provided a much-needed barrier between the school, the neighborhood and Route 50. However, I would also emphasize the enhancement and upkeep of this and other park spaces, not merely preserving their bounds but letting them flourish as centerpieces of our communities.

Question 5: The County Board initiated the Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study (WRAPS) process to plan the future development of the Wilson School site and the adjacent County fire station and Rosslyn Highlands Park. Notwithstanding a strong expression by the WRAPS committee and surrounding community that Rosslyn Highlands Park be preserved, County staff has proposed a plan giving County land to a private developer with the potential loss of two-thirds of the park. Do you support preservation of all of Rosslyn Highlands Park in its current location? If not, why not?



Clement:

I am appalled that the County negotiated in total secrecy a deal to trade County parkland to Penzance in return for a new fire station. I am outraged that the County instituted the so-called WRAPS process to rubberstamp the deal. If elected I will lobby to end the co-optation of the County's planning process by developers and their shills in County government.

I support preservation of Rosslyn Highlands Park. I also support preservation of historic Wilson School, and I believe that both are mutually compatible under a plan proposed by preservationists associated with the Arlington Historic Affairs and Landmark Review Board (AHLRB) headed by Joan Lawrence. The only thing that is not feasible on the WRAPS site is the Penzance development. I believe that Penzance will ultimately agree with that proposition, when it can't rent the office space it builds on the parkland it acquires from the County.

Cristol: Any process to determine site use must be open to - and transparent to - the community. I find unacceptable the lack of transparency in the WRAPS process; in particular, what Katie Elmore has described to me as a pre-existing County LOI with Penzance that was not disclosed to the community work group. Similarly, the lack of full accounting about why the Thomas Jefferson site represents the most strategic, long-term solution for South Arlington elementary overcrowding has fed the sense that the community asset of TJ Park is being devalued. The County has to do better on communications and honest dealing with the community in our process.

Dorsey: I do, because the green spaces in Rosslyn are woefully inadequate for current, let alone future demand. I do not believe there are enough efficiencies that can be gained by park design that could offset the harm caused by the proposed reduced square footage in RHP. That reduced square footage will result in a catastrophic loss of green space in the community.

McMenamin: I am for maintaining the 30,000 square feet of parkland in Rosslyn. I am very flexible as to how we do this, but I oppose giving away part of the park to a private developer and thereby losing much needed Green Space in Rosslyn. We should keep the Fire Station where it is today and find suitable designs for the land that would retain the 30,000 square feet of parkland. This can only be accomplished by working with the developer and the community, which is a core reason for my run for County Board.

VOTE on November 3rd

Friends of Arlington Parks thanks the candidates for taking the time to provide written statements and then appear at the special forum on parkland to communicate their support for Arlington Parks and natural resources. We also thank the organizations that sponsored this event.

Updates on Parkland at Risk

Rosslyn Highlands Park--- This has been a decade-long battle fought by neighbors and park advocates to preserve the greenspace at Wilson School and Rosslyn Highlands Park. In 2007 Friends of Arlington parks urged the County to protect this greenspace. A few comments to the Board we made back then include:

"Friends of Arlington Parks has long been concerned about the critical shortage of green space along the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor. The Public Spaces Master Plan, which was adopted by the County Board last year, also emphasized the need for open space in the R-B Corridor. Surviving green spaces, whether on County or APS properties, should be preserved to meet the needs of the growing population along the Corridor. Accordingly, Friends of Arlington Parks strongly recommends restoring the athletic fields at

Wilson School and maintaining the green space and active recreation areas in Rosslyn Highlands Park. We are confident that APS can meet its funding needs without sacrificing irreplaceable green space in this critical location.”



*Rosslyn Highland Park
with Wilson School in
background*

Unfortunately the County secretly entered into an agreement with a developer to trade parkland for development rights and a pledge to build a firehouse for the County. Rosslyn Highlands Park and the Wilson School fields are the only large contiguous tract of open space left near Rosslyn and this greenspace now stands to be significantly diminished instead of approved upon. The County should not have entered into a secret agreement to trade County parkland before the public study began, and the County should not have voted to continue development at the expense of parkland, particularly in this area that is already devoid of greenspace.

Thomas Jefferson Middle School -- The site of TJ Middle School and County parkland adjacent to it were considered in 2014 for a proposed new elementary school. In January of 2015 the County Board decided not to approve the Thomas Jefferson site for building a new school at that time, in large part because of the objections of neighbors and park advocates such as Friends of TJ Park and Arlington Parks Coalition. In addition, the County imposed conditions on further consideration of this site, including the condition that any new school at TJ should be on the northwest corner of site where there is now a parking lot, and not built on green space. In June 2015, the South Arlington Working Group (SAWG) was created to report by December to the School Board on site recommendations for a 725-seat neighborhood elementary school in South Arlington. Eventually this group decided that the Thomas Jefferson Middle School site was still the best option.



Thomas Jefferson School and fields

Friends of TJ Park and other park advocates say that the parking lot site is County parkland and should be converted back to green park space in an area that is increasingly in need of recreational and passive land.

Recently the owner of a nearby property, Dominion Arms Apartment Complex, proposed to give the County property on their site in exchange for rights to increase density when they choose to rebuild the aging complex. There has been concern that if this offer is considered it would delay the proposed opening of the school in 2019-2020. Others have argued that the increased density would lead to overcrowding and traffic problems in the area. Proponents say that the offer should at least be studied as they are developing a plan that will create a school for 50 years or more.



SAWG, the South Arlington Working Group, will host a Community Forum at Wakefield HS on Oct 29, 2015 from 7-9pm.

Reeves Farmhouse in Bluemont Park

Reeves Farm was the last dairy farm to operate in Arlington County. The County previously purchased it and surrounding land, which sits adjacent to Bluemont Park. In September 2015 the County Board voted to divide the property into two lots to facilitate the sale of the farmhouse portion of the lot. The division would allow the County to sell the property to a private entity and hold on to the parkland around it. The property would still be subject to the historic district guideline in which it is located. The public hearing preceding the vote was announced only 24 hours beforehand, and the board was divided, with Walter Tejada and Jay Fisette voting against it, citing that they would like to give more time to proposals for renovation.

This all came after several proposals to repurpose and restore the farmhouse were considered and rejected by the County, on the grounds that they did not seem to be self-funded. The County was reluctant to provide the bulk of the funds to renovate the farmhouse, a cost estimated by the County to be two million dollars or more.

One such proposal was to repurpose the property to house the Reeveland Learning Center, a plan put forward by Joan Horwitt. Joan helped to create, run and champion the Reevesland Learning Garden near the farmhouse. Over the last four years thousands of Arlington elementary-school children, teachers and other adults have worked and studied how to grow healthy food in the Learning Garden.

Here Joan Horwitt describes the campaign: "A natural, widely-supported next step would be the adaptive reuse of the 19th century Reeves farmhouse as a learning center where Arlington kids and adults could be educated about growing and preparing healthy food and strengthening community. The farmhouse has been boarded-up and badly neglected since the County bought it from the Reeves family in 2001, shortly after the death of Nelson Reeves. Four civic associations voted, and more than 600 Arlingtonians from North and South Arlington signed a letter to the County Board calling on the County to renovate the farmhouse. Longtime Arlington residents, including me, established the nonprofit Reevesland Learning Center that pledged to operate education programs and manage the farmhouse after it was renovated by

the County. We also identified some \$400,000 in resources to assist with the renovation, while the County appropriated \$500,000 to begin work on stabilizing the farmhouse foundation.”

Another group, the Reeves Farm Conservation Society, has been formed to try to restore and repurpose the farmhouse. [Here is a statement that they sent about their mission:](#)

“Our plan is to 1) preserve and/or restore the Reeves farmhouse to the period of its historic significance, both inside and out, while bringing it up to code for use as an interpreted historic house museum and facility for small events, 2) renovate the garage to contain a teaching kitchen and ADA-compliant bathrooms, 3) restore the milk shed for interpretation as a component of the Reeves Farm historic house museum, 4) add some form of pavilion to hold larger events, and 5) add walkways, bike racks and parking necessary to make the facility more accessible to the general public. We hope to develop and fund the property and its program in such a way that it is able to produce sufficient revenue to be self-sustaining as an educational and recreational public venue for the foreseeable future.”

They plan to try to raise the funds through tax-deductible contributions from individual donors, support from corporations and foundations, and state and federal government sources.

The County Board has directed the County Manager not to record the subdivision plat at this time. The County has up to three years after approval to record the plat so organizations such as those mentioned above have time to mount a campaign for restoration of the historic farmhouse.



Reeves Farmhouse in Bluemont Park with vegetable garden from Reevesland Learning Center in foreground.

Volunteering and Programs in the Parks

Check out the County Website for opportunities to volunteer in our parks and help with invasive plant removal and join other events.

<http://environment.arlingtonva.us/events/>

DATE/TIME	EVENT
11/07/2015 9:00 am-11:00 am	RiP - Haley Park Invasive Plant Removal <i>James W. Haley Park</i>
11/07/2015 10:00 am-12:00 pm	Homeowner Rain Garden Workshop <i>Providence Community Center</i>
11/08/2015 2:00 pm-4:30 pm	RiP - Gulf Branch Invasive Plant Removal <i>Gulf Branch Nature Center & Park</i>
11/15/2015 2:00 pm-5:00 pm	RiP - Long Branch Invasive Plant Removal <i>Long Branch Nature Center at Glencarlyn Park</i>
11/21/2015 10:00 am-12:00 pm	RiP - Tuckahoe Park Invasive Plant Removal <i>Tuckahoe Elementary School</i>
11/21/2015 2:00 pm-4:00 pm	RiP - Madison Manor Invasive Plant Removal <i>Madison Manor Park, 12th Rd N & N Powhatan St</i>
11/22/2015 10:00 am-12:00 pm	RiP - Ft. Bennett Invasive Plant Removal <i>Dawson Terrace Community Center & Park</i>
11/28/2015 10:00 am-12:00 pm	RiP - Benjamin Banneker Park <i>Benjamin Banneker Park</i>

EDITORIAL: Stand Up for Parkland

by Suzanne Bolton

For over thirty-five years, the Friends of Arlington Parks has been advocating for public parkland with special emphasis on those passive lands that provide habitat for wildlife and enjoyment, contemplation, and learning for the public. For many years that advocacy has taken the form of arguing the importance of (1) bonds that would fund purchase of new parkland and (2) annual basic operating budgets for the Park and Recreation Department to maintain and enhance those parklands.

Our efforts have been bolstered by the general public in surveys and studies, conducted by the County staff, that have ranked those passive areas of habitat and pathways as the highest importance in their County's retinue of public lands.

For years we have urged support of park bonds for purchase of parkland because, under Virginia law, those lands, purchased by bonds, could only be used for the purpose stated in the bond. We thought that this language guaranteed that land for park use would be preserved and maintained as the population and need for such lands increased. Repeatedly, Parks officials told us that lands purchased by bonds were protected in perpetuity as parkland. Advocates for parks used this argument when encouraging the public to support the vote for park bonds.

Several years ago, the County manager changed the wording of park bond request to include not just purchase of land but maintenance and various other uses. Because the monies were no longer dedicated strictly for purchase of land, the guarantee of dedication as parkland continuity no longer existed. Among other things, it was the only way that the County could use the houses on the Walter Reed Community Center for other purposes than park usage. The very act of changing the bond language demonstrated that the County and County attorneys were also aware of the limitation on bond-purchased lands. FAP decreased their role in park bond advocacy because of this language change.

This year we were faced with a new threat to those parklands initiated by the County in a hastily conceived concept named Public Land for Public Good. The name sounded innocuous until it was revealed that the County needed more land for schools and for affordable housing commitments and they were not considering purchase of new land. Parkland was suddenly on the chopping block and open to possible conversion to other uses. County Attorneys surprised park advocates with the explanation that the protection afforded by bond purchase was only valid until the bond was paid off. It is interesting that the County accepted the perpetuity concerns when they had to use the housing at Walter Reed for other than park purposes but have now taken the next step forward to deny that bond purchase ever meant protection in perpetuity for parkland. By this line of reasoning, bond purchase for parkland is just a delayed approach for obtaining land for other County facilities or for trade to the private sector for other needs.

Along with many other organizations and individuals, Friends of Arlington Parks spoke out about development on parks and open spaces. In January 2015 the County Board decided to set aside this initiative and let the new Facilities Study Committee evaluate possible locations, but park and open space sites are still being considered for development.



It is no easy process to recreate parkland once it has been converted to housing and other infrastructure. Increasing population means more demand for recreation and hiking, walking, and biking paths, as well as parkland for educational and contemplative needs. To sustain wildlife with increasing human population growth requires more connections between habitat areas, not less. Though preserving and

enhancing our park and green space has always been a stated priority for Arlington County, as well as keeping parkland proportional to a growing population, in reality we have been moving in the other direction. We have been steadily losing tree cover and losing the ability to add more park space due to available space being developed and not purchased for parkland. The failure to fully protect our green spaces and natural resources as well as the lack of spending on land acquisition is detrimental to Arlington County.

I had hoped to leave the Presidency of Friends of Arlington Parks with a feeling of security that my fellow volunteers over the years had done their best to provide Arlington with a stable parkland base, but I do not feel assured in this. I do hope others will speak out to protect and enhance our parks so that Arlington will remain a green gateway to the state of Virginia.

In Memory of Terry Coleman Hillerich

Friends of Arlington Parks would like to pay homage to the memory of Terry Hillerich, our longtime Treasurer and member of our Board of Directors.

Terry passed away January 24, 2015, at home. He is survived by his wife Judy, four children and eight grandchildren. He was born in 1949 in Washington, D.C. but was an Arlington resident for most of his life. Terry devoted many tireless hours in support of Friends of Arlington Parks, the parks in Arlington and those in the rest of the state. He was employed by Northern Virginia Community College and set the standards for motorcycle safety and expertise in their acclaimed motorcycle program. A gentle man, he combined his love of motorcycles and our State's natural resources by leading trips in Virginia Parks to spread his appreciation for these natural resources to others.



Terry steered the fiscal direction of Friends of Arlington Parks as he would his own and continued as treasurer even when his health was failing. He always provided thoughtful and caring advice on issues in our parks, guided by a lifetime of observing and enjoying this County's parks. In addition to his background in physical education and concern for the athletic programs in the County, his passion was for the more passive areas and maintaining those resources for the other biota that share this County with us. His historical and biological knowledge of our parks was a real asset to our organization. We valued Terry's wisdom and advice on all matters.

We will certainly miss Terry for his compassion and friendship, his quiet council on Arlington's Parks programs and his steady support for our parks in general. The Arlington park community and Arlington will certainly feel his absence.

Friends of Arlington Parks Membership form

To join friend of Arlington Parks or to renew your membership, mail this form and payment to:
Friends of Arlington Parks, Jay Wind, Treasurer, 611 South Ivy Street, Arlington VA 22204.
Please make checks payable to *Friend of Arlington Parks*. You may also renew your membership online with a credit card.

Name or Organization: _____

Street address: _____

Cit, State and Zip _____

email address: _____

Individual, \$10.00 _____ Family, \$20.00 _____ Organization, \$25.00 _____ Other contribution _____

Check here to get your newsletter by email. _____

Add me to your volunteer list and contact. _____

Visit us on the web at www.foap.org

**Friends of Arlington Parks
611 South Ivy Street
Arlington VA 22204**