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Mosaic Park Master Plan

On September 26, 2009, the County Board approved a Master Plan for Mosaic Park, located near Ballston Common Mall, between North Quincy and North Pollard Streets. This is the first major park development project in recent years along the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor, where it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide adequate park facilities to meet the needs of a growing population. The Shooshan Company is expected to provide funding for this project in return for a transfer of density to the nearby Founder's Square project.

Mosaic Park will be developed in two phases. Phase 1 relates to parcels that the County already owns or expects to acquire soon under the Founder's Square Site Plan agreement. Phase 2 will depend on future acquisition of the parking lot at Gold's Gym.

The master plan is the result of a lengthy public process. The Mosaic Park Planning Team included representatives of nearby civic associations (Ashton Heights, Buckingham, Ballston-Virginia Square), the Ballston-Virginia Square

Partnership, the Planning Commission, the Park and Recreation Commission, and the Shooshan Company.

The plan calls for a variety of features to meet the needs a broad range of park visitors. Phase 1 will include:

- A plaza in the northwest corner of the park, where residents and those who work nearby can sit in the shade to enjoy a book or lunch. The plaza took on a more garden-like character in the course of discussions in the stakeholder group.
- An interactive water feature with fountains near the plaza and a channel to carry the water from the fountains to a point in the southwest part of the park. The water feature will be designed to appeal to adults as well as children.
- A rain garden in the southwest corner of the park to collect stormwater runoff, which will be stored in an underground tank.
- A children's play area and a multi-purpose area along the eastern side of the park, constructed from synthetic materials to make them child-friendly and to reduce maintenance expenses.
- Green space, including a lawn area in the south end of the park and trees scattered about the park. In response to requests from residents, green space was expanded as the plan evolved.



Mosaic Park Master Plan county drawing

Phase 2 of the plan, which probably will not be implemented for ten years or more, will provide additional lawn space and a half-court outdoor basketball court.

Mosaic Park will include a number of environmentally-friendly features:

- As the plan evolved, the amount of impervious surface was reduced while green space was increased.
- The number of trees to be planted also increased. Some 90 shade trees, as well as other plantings, will provide significant tree canopy as they mature.
- Water from the underground tank near the rain garden will be used for on-site irrigation, reducing water consumption by the park.
- Electricity from wind turbines and solar panels will help to meet energy needs for lighting, pumps for irrigation, and pumps for the water feature if the water is filtered and recycled.

Although the master plan has been approved, many details remain to be determined. Detailed park design is expected to begin in 2012, and Phase 1 construction could begin two years later. When completed, Mosaic Park will represent a significant addition to the County's park system. The location in an area of high density development – with growing numbers of residents and workers nearby – makes it even more valuable.

Donations for Parks

Area Donation Programs

Some area jurisdictions have programs that accept tax-deductible donations for acquiring parkland and improving parks. In Montgomery County, Maryland, a manager in the Department of Parks administers a program for tax-deductible donations and grants. The county program largely replaces a program that was administered through a foundation. Green Gifts can be donated for various commemorative purposes to honor or memorialize a person or to celebrate a special event. Donations can apply to a favorite park or program, items identified by Parks staff, or community projects. Monetary donations can be used for planting new trees or replacing damaged trees, saving trees from non-native invasive species, or installing benches in scenic areas. Donations used exclusively for public purposes are tax-deductible.

In Alexandria, several funds or accounts established by the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities accept tax-deductible donations. Alexandria's Open Space Fund seeks to enhance and grow open spaces by working with the public and an advisory group to achieve 15 open space goals set forth in the Open Space Master Plan. Individuals can make a direct contribution to the city's fund to acquire and enhance open space sites. Individuals can also donate to a Living Landscape Fund to remember a special occasion, event, or person. Donations are used to plant trees and gardens, place park benches, and install park amenities. Donors may designate a specific use for the money and preferred location. Alexandria also has accounts for donations to the arts, recreation, and senior programs.

Fairfax City has recently approved a Legacy for Parks Program that accepts tax-deductible donations for a wide variety of park enhancements and programs. The Parks and Recreation Department has

developed a guidance manual. A large contribution has been made for a community center. The possibility of establishing a foundation is also under consideration. Staff reports and documents and videos of council meetings are available on the city Website.

In Fairfax County, a foundation supports the park authority by raising private funds and creating partnerships to supplement tax dollars to meet community needs for park facilities, services, and open space. Since its establishment in 2000, the foundation has raised nearly \$2.5 million for projects such as open space land acquisition, summer camp tuition for low income children, and a playground designed for children with disabilities.

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Foundation works exclusively with the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. The Foundation was created to generate new sources of revenue to expand, improve, and conserve Northern Virginia's natural and historic places and parkland. The Foundation accepts tax-deductible contributions of cash and land for general or specific projects. For example, at Potomac Overlook Regional Park, donations and grants from Dominion Virginia Power and Exxon support a nature center with interactive exhibits and kiosks for educating the public on energy conservation in a recreational setting. A children's garden is being planned for Meadowlark Botanical Gardens.

Donations to Government Agencies and Foundations

Tax-deductible donations for parks in area jurisdictions are made directly to a government agency or to a foundation. Foundations offer several advantages over government but come with significant disadvantages. Foundations have access to additional sources of funding, because some grants are available to 501(c)(3) organizations but not to governments. Foundations are allowed to solicit funds on the Internet, while agencies that have "gov" in their address cannot. Government agencies often have limited resources to encourage donations, whereas foundations have more resources available and can avoid government red tape to help speed up projects.

However, foundations also have significant disadvantages. It is difficult to find a foundation director who possesses essential skills in both politics and fundraising. Unless the priorities of the foundation manager and board match government priorities, friction and confusion may occur and serious political battles can ensue. The operations of a foundation require constant oversight to make sure that administrative and fundraising costs are reasonable and donations achieve their purpose. It is usually hard to change the direction of a foundation or dismantle it once it is in place.



Fairfax County apparently has a successful relationship with its parks foundation. Montgomery County, Maryland has tried both approaches. Initially, all donations were handled by a foundation. After the county received a 170(c)(1) letter from IRS in 2003, it set up a government program for accepting donations and grants. As the goals of the foundation became different from those of the county, the county program largely replaced the foundation.

Donations to Arlington Parks

Many members of the public may not be aware that they can make monetary donations to Arlington parks through the Arlington Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources (PRCR). The information below has been provided by financial managers in PRCR. After hearing reports that some donors have had difficulty obtaining receipts for their donations, we requested confirmation that those making donations for parks would receive receipts or thank you letters stating that the donations are tax-deductible. At press time, we have not yet received such confirmation.

According to PRCR financial managers, the county has established Trust and Agency Accounts for public purposes. Among the accounts that may be of interest to parks supporters are accounts for general parks division donations, healing garden, community aesthetic enhancement (flowers), commemorative trees, nature centers, invasives, and community canine areas. Donations can also be directed to accounts for specific parks or projects, such as Friends of Gulf Branch Nature Center. Anyone interested in establishing other accounts or in donating land should contact PRCR.

Checks for tax-deductible donations should be made payable to Treasurer, Arlington County and **should make clear that the funds are being donated for “public purposes.”** All donations to PRCR come with the following declaration: “Government is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia and as such is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization so your donation is applicable for IRS tax credit. Our tax-exempt number is 54-6001123.” Specific accounts can be noted on the memo line of the check. Checks should be mailed to Director, Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources, 2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 414, Arlington, VA 22201.

Friends of Arlington Parks encourages Arlington County to develop a process that would make it easier for the public to make tax-deductible contributions for the acquisition and maintenance of parks. Arlington’s PRCR Leadership Team is working on a web process for accepting donations and hopes to have it available by summer.

Eagle Scout Project in Lubber Run

Parks in Arlington have benefited in the past from Boy Scout troop and Eagle Scout service projects. These kinds of projects are excellent because they help preserve or enhance our parks and green spaces at little or no cost to the county, and they help those involved with the project learn more about nature and how to support green environments.

This fall Josh Patecell, a 16-year-old Arlington County resident, completed an Eagle Scout Project at Lubber Run that was exemplary and very beneficial to the park.



Josh Patecell working amongst the saplings he planted.

He completed the planting of 20 trees (each about 6 feet tall) along a hillside that had been cleared of vegetation last year when the County completed a sewer drainage project in the area.

Josh began the project by clearing invasives from his project site and adjacent areas. He invited and organized volunteers to help with this and the tree planting. The native trees Josh planted, which included white oaks and sycamores, came from seeds that were collected by Boy Scout troop members and grown in the troop nursery. He planted the Sycamores by the creek and the oaks on the hillside, following guidelines the county gave to avoid the sewer line.



Volunteers help mulch the newly planted trees.

The benefits of this new grove of trees are considerable. As the trees mature, they will help protect the creek below from erosion on the hillside, help increase all-important tree canopy in Arlington, beautify the area, and help provide a sound barrier between the park and adjacent Route 50. Friends of Arlington Parks commends Josh for his work to help protect and improve one of our wooded parks.



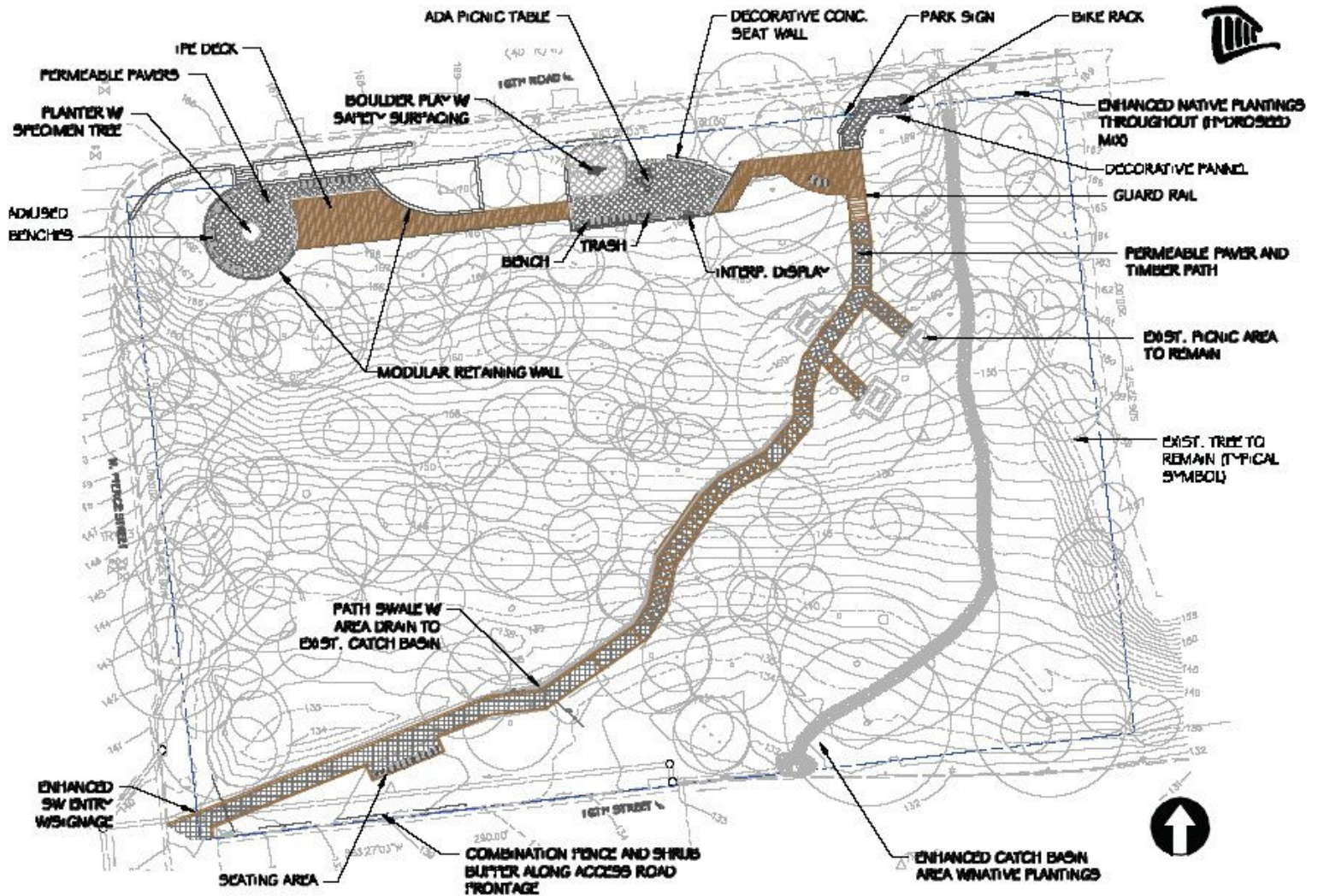
Part of the newly planted hillside at Lubber Run Park.

New Plan for Hillside Park

The County has approved a new conceptual plan for Hillside Park, a small park at the edge of Rosslyn. Some new amenities are to be added, using funds provided by the developer of the Parc Rosslyn apartments as part of a density purchase. As indicated on the conceptual plan, new facilities along the

north edge of the park will include a play area for children, a picnic table, and seating areas, all connected by an ADA-compliant walkway.

This is a wooded park, and the circles on the plan represent trees. As the circles indicate, there are a few mature trees and a much larger number of young trees in the park. The plan was developed following a series of stakeholder meetings, and residents made clear in those meetings that preserving the trees was their top priority. It was evident that residents appreciate being able to walk to a wooded park where they can enjoy nature.



HILLSIDE PARK CONCEPTUAL PLAN

16TH ROAD NORTH & NORTH PIERCE STREET

It may seem surprising to find a wooded park in a densely developed area such as Rosslyn, but topography is a key factor. As the name suggests, Hillside Park is on a steep hill and is not well suited for most other uses.

Sites for new amenities were carefully chosen with tree preservation in mind. Although the walkway connecting the new features along the north edge of the park will be constructed primarily with permeable pavers, wood decking will be used whenever it passes near a tree. No mature trees will be removed.

The plan shows a trail connecting the northeast and southwest corners of the park. It will be constructed using permeable pavers and timbers. In addition, it will follow the route of an existing trail to minimize tree impacts. Since the trail cuts through the heart of the park, it will be important to avoid the use of heavy equipment in its construction.

There will be a new interpretive display to tell visitors about the plants and wildlife found in the park. This is an important addition because helping residents to better understand what they can see in wooded parks and natural areas is a good way to generate public support for devoting some of the County's limited parklands to these uses.

While plans for Hillside Park were being developed, park planners met with naturalists and urban foresters. The naturalists offered to help develop planting lists, focusing on native plants that would enhance biodiversity and the quality of wildlife habitat. Friends of Arlington Parks encourages the County to continue to bring naturalists into the planning process for future projects in wooded parks and natural areas.

In relation to invasive vines, Hillside Park is a success story, at least for the moment. At one time, the park was overrun by English ivy and other invasives. Several years ago, volunteers invested long hours clearing the park of invasives. Now, unfortunately, the invasives are starting to come back, and controlling them will be vital to the future health of native plants and wildlife in the park.

Friends of Arlington Parks commends the park planners for their efforts to avoid tree loss in the course of this project, and also for working with naturalists to develop a planting list that will enhance the wildlife habitat value of this small park.

Reclaim Park Bond Guarantees

The Real Green of Arlington

Like most societies when booming, Arlington made little effort to prepare for the bust and now we the citizens must pay the price in larger user fees and property taxes. Our park budget concerns are caught up in this draught of funds.

Arlington residents once had control over moneys garnered from bonds designated for parkland purchase. The bonds were clearly designated for park purchase and no other purpose. The purpose of the simple bond language was to assure that bond-purchased parkland could be used for no function but parkland. We had parks purchased in perpetuity without having to worry that the land would be used for a firehouse, police station, or installation for housing county employees in overflow situations.

In the last bonds, the County Manager decided to end this guarantee and changed the simple language to include “other purposes”. In one pen stroke, the guarantees were denied to us. Bond moneys were no longer assured of being used to purchase land but could be used at the discretion of the County Manager and Board.

This change was made with clear intent. In that fateful year, during a budget presentation to the Park and Recreation Commission, when asked if the guarantee of certainty would be affected by the language change, it was explained that the Manager needed more flexibility in the use of land and resources. There would no longer be a guarantee, only the good faith of the County Board.

Once the language was changed, residents no longer had a say over the use of those bond funds. When park money was diverted for a plan to fund the expense of the Cultural Center in Rosslyn, the Civic Federation Parks Committee had very little basis for objecting. The money will be replaced, we are assured.

But, even if parkland is purchased with new funds, there is no guarantee that the land will be sustained as parkland. If, in the future, the County Board thinks that another county facility is needed, and no easily accessible land is available in the vicinity, that parkland purchased with new bond money can be used and the park function lost.

A new Bond is on the horizon. This is the opportunity to tell the new County Manager and the County Board that we want our parkland guarantee reinstated if we are to support a 2010 Bond for parks. Many of us appreciate the natural “green” of the parklands that pepper our county and, with the inevitable growth in population, these oases of green will only increase in value. If you have never written a letter or e-mail to the County Board, this is the time. We the citizens need to reclaim our control over the purchase and retention of parkland for park purposes in perpetuity. Let’s make Arlington greener with parks that will remain parks through the worst of times and the best of times.

Saving Our Parks in a Declining Economy

How can we preserve precious parkland, especially during times of significant budget constraints? In other area jurisdictions, funding for parks has been hit especially hard compared to other programs. With the relatively small proportion of money already available for parks in the budget and bonds, we must let our government officials know that adequate funding must be provided to maintain our parks and to allow the acquisition of increasingly scarce parcels of land for parks.

Here are some things that you can do to help save Arlington parks:

1. Join Friends of Arlington Parks, and also work with other local and regional organizations that support parks.
2. Contact the County Board and County Manager as well as the Director of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources to let them know that you consider parks important and that adequate funding must be provided in the budget to maintain our parks. It will be especially useful if you can recommend other sources of revenue or describe budget items that you are willing to cut so that park funding can be maintained.

3. Contact the County Board and County Manager when parks bonds are proposed with suggestions for language to assure that bond money will be spent on parks instead of other projects.
4. Adopt a park. The parks department can provide information about its Adopt-A-Park program.
5. Make tax-deductible donations to the parks department for public purposes.
6. Consider donating a conservation easement for your property. One source of information is the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (www.nvct.org).
7. Thank a park employee or the parks department. The department has many dedicated employees whose bosses rarely hear how much the public appreciates their hard work.
8. Participate in events to clean up parks and rescue plants.
9. Support local groups that sponsor native plant sales.
10. Participate in classes. Become a Master Gardener, Master Naturalist or Tree Steward.
11. Stay informed about changes in park areas, such as those along Four Mile Run Restoration Project. For more information about the restoration project, please contact Laura Grape (Northern Virginia Regional Commission at lgrape@novaregion.org or Jason Papacosma (Arlington, jpapacosma@arlingtonva.us).
12. Work with your local school and parks department to protect land that can be used for parks and education.

Seeking New Members

Friends of Arlington Parks is seeking new members! We are an all-volunteer force whose Board of Trustees meets monthly. We are looking for both passive and active membership.

Active members: We need more members to join the Board of trustees for Friends of Arlington Parks. This small group typically meets the second Thursday every month to discuss recent developments in park issues and plan strategies to respond to these issues. Please email us at info@foap.org, or make a comment on your membership form if you have some interest in joining our Board.

Passive members: Members who support us through maintaining their annual dues (\$7.00 per year for individual membership) are very important to us as they help us pay for such costs as our newsletter and website, and could be available to step forward and support a Friends of Arlington Parks initiative when they are called upon.

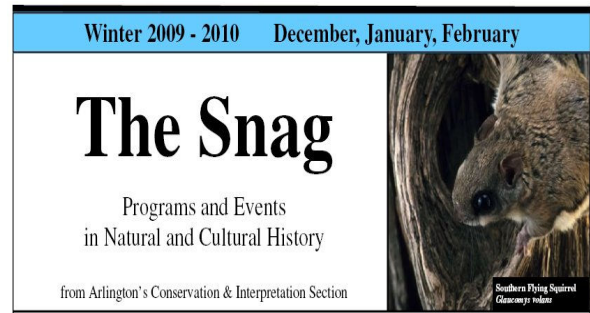


If you are already a member, thank you for your support! If you would like to join please fill out the enclosed membership form.

Don't forget to check the Arlington County Website for park-related activities and listings for activities at the Gulf Brach and Long Branch Nature center.

Nature center activities are described in the Snag publication that is available on line at:

<http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/nature/ParksRecreationScriptsNatureSnag.aspx>



From the County PRCR Website

Please join us for a presentation on the natural treasures in our backyards!

ARLINGTON COUNTY'S NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCE INVENTORY

Thursday, February 4, 7:00 pm

Arlington County Central Library Auditorium

1015 N. Quincy Street, 2 blocks from Virginia Square Metro



Greg Zell at base of the largest tree in Arlington County, a Tulip Poplar at C.F. Smith Park

The county's natural resources are more extensive and diverse than might be expected in an urban setting. Within Arlington's boundaries are globally-rare natural communities, old-age forest remnants, wetlands and springs, a number of state champion trees, and unique locations harboring many uncommon plants and wild flowers. Greg Zell, Natural Resource Specialist with Arlington County, Virginia, will discuss the County's efforts in documenting Arlington's natural resources at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 4, at Arlington's Central Library Auditorium, 1015 North Quincy St.

Co-sponsored by Arlington Regional Master Naturalists (ARMN), Tree Stewards of Arlington and Alexandria, Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE), Arlington's Remove Invasive Plants (RIP) and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Friends of Arlington Parks Membership Form

To join Friends of Arlington Parks, or renew your membership, mail this form and payment to:

Terry Hillerich, Treasurer, 3555 N. Somerset Street, Arlington, VA 22213

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ Phone: _____

email address: _____

Check here to get your newsletter by email _____

Add me/us to the volunteer list and contact. _____

_____ \$7 Individual _____ \$12 Family _____ \$20 Organization _____ Other contributions

Please make checks payable to "Friends of Arlington Parks"

You may also renew your membership on the web with a credit card by visiting **www.foap.org**.

Friends of Arlington Parks
3555 North Somerset Street
Arlington, VA 22213

