## Fairfax County Park Authority











Parks & Recreation System Master Plan





**FINAL DECEMBER 2017** 

## Great Parks, Great Communities for Today and the Future



As we look to the future of Fairfax County, we see parks and recreational opportunities as more important than ever. Despite challenges with our economic recovery, the Fairfax County Park Authority has continued to meet the community's growing needs at a

high, nationally-recognized standard of excellence.

Over the next 10 years, we will continue this track record of success as one of the nation's premier park and recreation systems. We created the Great Parks, Great Communities Parks and Recreation System Master Plan to help us do just this.

As our "guiding star," the master plan presents a framework and related policies and goals to chart the course for all agency initiatives, plans, and programs over the next several years. It is the culmination of nearly three years of ongoing engagement with community members, park stakeholders, user groups, staff and partners.

Our commitment to meeting community needs and quality public service is at the core of this plan, which is why our first step was to learn what residents want by completing the Parks Count! Needs Assessment in spring 2016. Over the past year, the park board and our staff have worked tirelessly to prepare a plan that delivers on what we learned.

The master plan includes seven guiding principles and six goals approved by the Park Authority Board that will focus our funding and resources on the highest community priorities. Moving forward, the plan will become an integral part of day-to-day business through our partnerships, programming, capital improvements, communications, and stewardship activities.

I hope you find it inspiring, and I look forward to seeing you in the parks!

Warmest Regards,

Wille S. Boine

William G. Bouie, Chairman

### 2017 Park Authority Board Members

- + William G. Bouie, Chairman, Hunter Mill District
- + Mary Cortina\*, Vice Chair, At-large
- + Michael Thompson, Jr., Secretary,
- Springfield District
- + Linwood Gorham, Treasurer, Mount Vernon District
- + Walter Alcorn, At-large
- + Cynthia Jacobs Carter, Lee District
- + Maggie Godbold, Sully District
- + Tim Hackman, Dranesville District
- + Faisal Kahn, At-large
- + Ronald Kendall\*, Mason District
- + Ken Quincy, Providence District
- + Kiel Stone\*, Braddock District
- + Frank S. Vajda\*, Mason District
- + Anthony J. Vellucci\*, Braddock District

\*Asterisk indicates the member served a partial year.

For 67 years, the Fairfax County Park Authority Board has provided oversight of the parks and recreation system by setting policy, establishing priorities, and directing the effective and efficient use of funds.

The 12-member board is appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and retains fiduciary responsibility for the agency. The board includes one representative from each of the nine magisterial districts, plus three at-large members.





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- B. Existing Conditions and Trends Summary
- C. Needs Analysis Summary
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- G. Board Action Item for Master Plan Approval

#### Supplemental Technical Information in the 2016 Parks Count! Needs Assessment

- Recreation and Leisure Trends Analysis
- Level of Service Standards
- Description of Related Plans
- Park Types & Program Listing
- Capital Improvement Program Framework

The Park Authority strives to ensure the right parks, programs and amenities are in the right places to serve the right community needs and protect the right resources.



## Overview

## Importance and Value of Parks and Recreation

Great parks and recreation systems lead to great communities, and are part of what makes Fairfax County and its diverse community thrive.

Encompassing over 23,000 acres of park land and open space with an average annual visitation rate of +17.5 million, the park system is integral to sustaining the quality of life that has attracted so many residents and visitors to live, work, shop, and play in Fairfax County. As Fairfax County grows and adapts to dynamic community needs, the park system will be an enduring source of value. This value stems from far-reaching and wide-ranging benefits.

### Importance of High Quality Parks to Quality of Life:

93%

of residents think high-quality parks, trails, recreation facilities and services are important or extremely important to the quality of life in Fairfax County.

Source: 2016 Parks Count! Needs Assessment

## Natural Capital & Environment

Parks and open space networks conserve natural resources and wildlife habitat, protect air and water quality, and preserve the environment for current and future generations.

#### Lifelong Community Well-Being

All residents, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or ability, have access to parks, which bring people together, connect people to each other and nature, and foster community identity.

## Value & Benefits of Parks and Recreation

#### Economic Value

Parks enhance property values and play a key role in attracting home buyers, employers, and workers to invest in communities.

### Beauty and Wonder

Gardens, rolling meadows, green trees, meandering and healthy streams, and lake vistas, make Fairfax County unique and memorable.

### Health & Lifestyle

Physical activity helps people maintain good health and people exercise more when they have access to parks and trails.

### Cultural Heritage

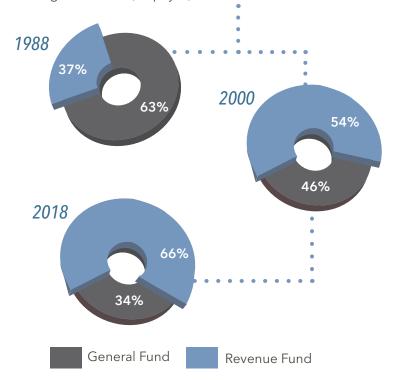
By protecting and preserving cultural resources, parks play an increasingly important role in securing, sharing, and enriching the heritage of the local community.

# DID YOU KNOW?

Most parks are **free** for the public to use and • • are enjoyed by about 90% of the County's +1.1 million residents. However, the park system operating costs are supported by less than one penny of every tax dollar.



Funding to sustain operation of the park system comes from two primary sources. As illustrated below, over time the reliance on revenues from fees and services has significantly outpaced general fund (taxpayer) contributions.



### Why Have a Parks and Recreation System Master Plan?

A long-range park and recreation system master plan helps the agency and public better understand the elements and assets of the system. The process and plan offer several benefits, including those listed below.

- Align programs, planning, and initiatives
- Provide a road map for system maintenance, reinvestment and expansion
- Articulate a defensible rationale for decision-making
- Enable strategic resource allocation (e.g. budgeting and staffing)
- Strengthen and foster strong partnerships
- Ensure safe and welcoming parks
- Provide an updated recreation facility mix
- Improve connectivity and access to nature
- Target programming and facility construction to meet gaps and needs
- Ensure long-term financial sustainability

## A Community-Driven Plan

The needs voiced by residents, park users, and community partners form the foundation of the master plan and are essential to this long-range plan for the park system. The multiyear planning process began with the extensive engagement, analysis and findings of the Parks Count! Needs Assessment. Public comments on the draft master plan underscored these findings and the focus of the plan.



## Planning Process Overview

Community input on the draft master plan reinforced the direction set by the Parks Count! Needs Assessment findings.

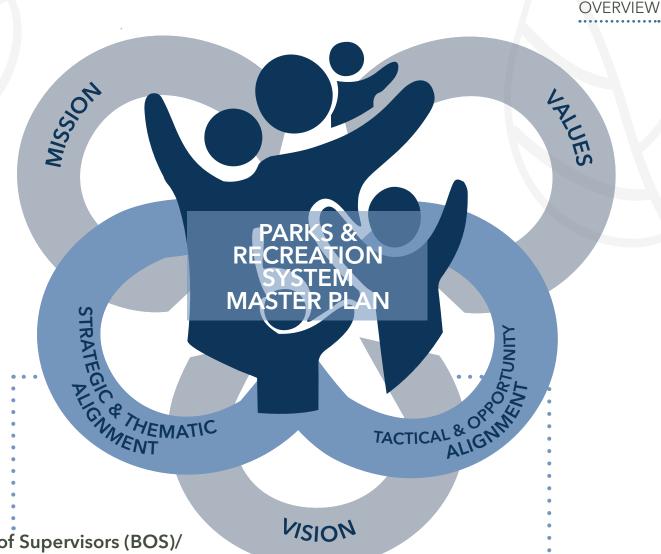
Public comments emphasized topics including: trail system maintenance and development, healthy and active lifestyles for all, ecosystem services and ecological integrity.

Robust stakeholder engagement is a hallmark of the Park Authority planning process.

The community input that guides this master plan included scores of stakeholder interviews, focus groups, public meetings, online engagement, a statistically valid community survey, staff open houses, meetings with partners and community groups, and agency leadership discussions.

Through the Parks Count! Needs Assessment online crowdsourcing alone, 700+ users shared 300 comments on 60 different topics.





### Board of Supervisors (BOS)/ County Plans Referenced for Alignment

- + BOS Vision & Priorities
- + BOS Environmental Vision
- + BOS Economic Success Strategic Plan
- + Community Health Improvement Plan
- + Comprehensive Plan
- + Fairfax First
- + Human Services Needs Assessment
- + One Fairfax
- + Tree Action Plan
- + 50+ Plan



Alignment of agency planning, programs and initiatives is critical for the long-term sustainability of the park system. The master plan aligns the broader strategic direction of the Park Authority with county priorities.

# Park Authority Plans Utilized in Alignment

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan
- Asset Management Plan/Total Cost of Ownership
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Cultural Resources Management Plan
- Division Operations Plans
- Energy Management Plan
- Financial Management Plan
- Natural Resources Management Plan
- Parks Count! Needs Assessment
- Park-Specific Master Plans
- Park Authority Policy Manual
- Recreation Programming Plan
- Strategic Plan
- Trail Development Strategy Plan

## **Needs and Trends**

#### Changing Development Trends

Planned redevelopment of strategic growth centers is leading to more urbanization in designated areas of the county.

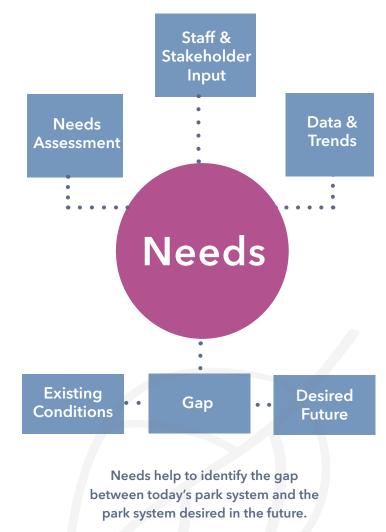
The greatest concentrations of future population growth will occur in these growth centers. Growth centers are designated in historically commercial areas with few or no parks.

The introduction of mixed-use development with a significant residential component creates a need for new parks and recreation.

### **Changing Climate Trends**

Warmer temperatures and worsening air quality are among the impacts of climate change that all park users experience.

Changes in the climate have significant effects on the natural and built environments, as well as the local economy. Parks are essential to helping the community adapt and address climate change. In order to keep pace with the demands of a growing and changing population, the Park Authority must consider how the dynamic nature of trends, lifestyles and activities will affect facility and programming needs.



References and additional information about the needs and trends considered in the planning process can be found in the Master Plan Appendix and 2016 Parks Count! Needs Assessment.

## **Changing Demographic Trends**

# 1

#### Strength of diversity.

Nearly 40% of county residents five years and older speak a language other than English at home, and nearly 32% are foreign born.

1

#### More interest in aging actively.

By 2025, over 26% of Fairfax County's population will be 55 years of age or older.

### **Changing Health Trends**

Increase in preventative care, lifestyle changes to improve physical and mental health.

Increase in sedentary lifestyles, more overweight people. Doctors are prescribing time outdoors and in parks.

Implications for Parks and Recreation include

volunteer opportunities

Implications for Parks and Recreation include

accommodate family gatherings and cluster

activities to support multi-generational events

need for culturally appropriate programs and

more 50+ recreation, mid-day programs, and

spaces, and multi-purpose fields (including

soccer and cricket among others)

- Implications for Parks and Recreation include
  more support for active living (walking, running, biking trails)
- desire to preserve open space and the environment
- parks must be accessible to all communities

### **Changing Parks and Recreation Trends**

Growing fitness membership, increasing number of fitness providers.

Rate of growth in fitness facilities is much greater in the DC area than national average, and the popularity of informal high-end fitness options is growing.

## Changing Social Trends

1

Increased importance of distinctive places & experiences.

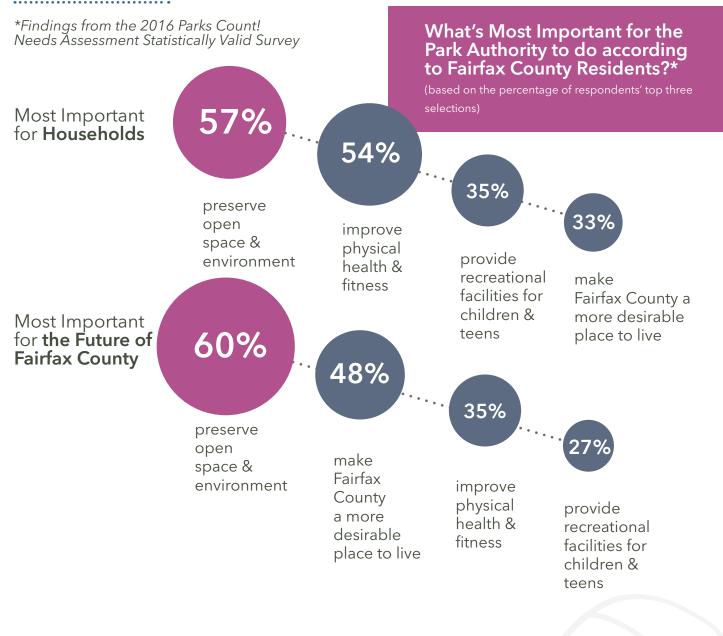
People choose where they live based on lifestyle and proximity to activities. Implications for Parks and Recreation include

- lost customers not easily replaced
- greater competition in market
- decreasing consumer demand for multipurpose generalist facilities

Implications for Parks and Recreation include

- reimagining in parks and other public places
- distinctive programs, events, and destination features
- interest and awareness of the natural environment and local history

#### NEEDS AND TRENDS



#### How Would Residents Spend \$100 of Park Authority Funds?\*

• \$13	• \$17	<b>\$</b> 18	\$22	\$30
develop new parks & recreation facilities	acquire new park land & open space	conserve/ maintain historic resources	·· upgrade/ maintain existing park facilities	repair/maintain existing parks & infrastructure

### NEEDS AND TRENDS

boating, fishing

boating, fishing

exercise

\*Findings from the 2016 Parks Count! Needs Assessment Statistically Valid Survey

\*\*Priority needs listed in order of priority with the #1 priority shown in bold.

under

### Priority Needs by Age Group\*

swim lessons

8 thru 49

biking, walking

special events

biking, walking

and over



summer camps

special events

biking, walking

exercise

exercise

special events

Priority Needs for Parks, Play Areas, Garden, Trails, Equestrian, Nature, or Historic Parks or Facilities\*

**paved walking/biking trails**, small community parks, unpaved walking/biking trails, public gardens, large regional parks, smaller neighborhood playgrounds, lake front parks and marinas, picnic/shelter areas, nature centers

#### Highest Priority\*\*

#### Priority Needs Rating for Indoor or Outdoor Facilities\*

**swimming pools**, exercise and fitness facilities, gyms (basketball, volleyball, etc.), water parks & spray grounds, soccer/lacrosse/football/field hockey/rugby fields, tennis courts, basketball/ multi-use courts

#### **Highest Priority\*\***

The need survey revealed general use patterns or preferences, as well as needs for individual activities, facilities, and services.

## **Guiding Framework**

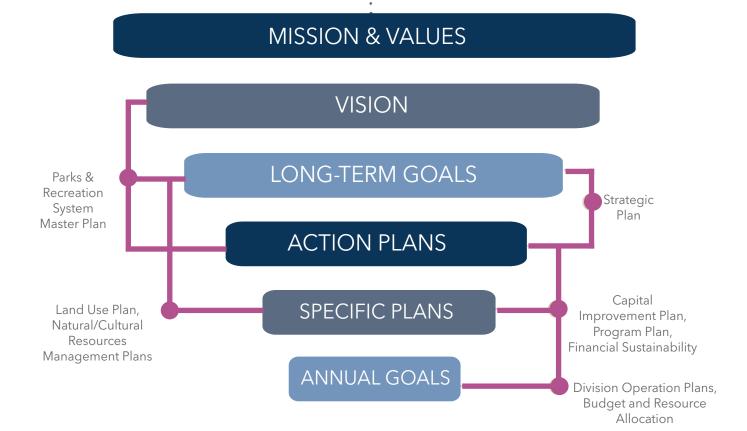
- The master plan guides the Park Authority in aligning all agency plans, programs and initiatives to
- support its mission and vision.



## **Park Authority Mission**

To set aside public spaces for and assist citizens in the protection and enhancement of environmental values, diversity of natural habitats and cultural heritage to guarantee that these resources will be available to both present and future generations.

To create and sustain quality facilities and services which offer citizens opportunities for recreation, improvement of their physical and mental well-being, and enhancement of their quality of life.



## **Master Plan Guiding Principles**

This master plan establishes long-term goals for the park system beginning with guiding principles that capture what the park system strives to be in the future.

Guiding principles are constant and articulate the core ideals that guide the master plan and the agency direction over the plan's 10year time horizon. The guiding principles are detailed in the figure below.

## **Park Authority Vision**

The Fairfax County Park Authority strives to inspire and sustain a passion for parks and leisure experiences that enhances our community's quality of life.



#### Inspire a Passion for Parks

communicate the benefits of parks and recreation; provide great park experiences; create an enduring park system legacy; provide great park destinations that connect and help build community; impart a passion for parks from generation to generation.

#### **Meet Changing Recreation Needs**

proactively respond to changing needs and trends; proactively manage facilities and program assets; engage and listening to the community.

#### Advance Park System Excellence

provide targeted, high quality programs and services; be mission-focused; maintain system quality and condition; embrace, lead and implement new ideas and best practices; leverage technology, make data-driven decisions and measure performance.

#### **Strengthen and Foster Partnerships**

collaborate with schools and other public agencies and non-profits; co-locate facilities, programs and services with others; expand relationships with the private sector; contribute to the local economy; empower volunteers and the community.

#### Be Equitable and Inclusive

provide quality facilities, programs and services to all communities; balance the distribution of parks, programs and facilities; ensure these are accessible and affordable.

#### **Be Great Stewards**

integrate stewardship and sustainability ethics in all plans and actions; raise awareness and appreciation for natural and cultural resources; serve as a model for urban nature conservation; protect and actively manage natural and cultural resources; be transparent, accountable and committed to responsible management.

#### **Promote Healthy Lifestyles**

provide facilities and programs for all ages to promote life-long activity and wellness; improve park access; expand trail system connections; provide an opportunity to connect with nature.

### GUIDING FRAMEWORK

Follow the connecting lines and arrows on pages 11 and 12 to see how the Master Plan and new Park Authority Strategic Plan are linked.

## **Master Plan Elements**

The master plan includes three related elements: guiding principles, goals and recommendations. The graphic on this page defines each of these elements and shows how they relate.

**Guiding** Principles

6

Core ideals and beliefs that are threaded throughout the plan and all aspects of the Park Authority

Needs Assessment/ Existing Plans/ Trends

## Goals

Desired results that the Park Authority plans for and commits to achieve

## 32 Recommendations

Priority activities necessary to achieve the goals







## **Strategic Objectives**

Projects and initiatives that support the recommendations

## **Strategic Plan Elements**

The new strategic plan includes strategic objectives and action steps that are measurable to demonstrate progress and results towards the master plan goals.

The graphic on this page shows how these elements relate and how the strategic plan will be a used to implement the master plan.

The strategic planning process began in late 2017 and will include public and staff involvement into spring 2018. Completion of the strategic plan is anticipated by summer 2018.



## **Action Steps**

Clear steps to accomplish the strategic objectives

Implementation

Review/update plans and allocate resources to complete action steps

#### Follow the connecting lines and arrows on pages 11 and 12 to see how the Master Plan and new Park Authority Strategic Plan are linked.

## Measure & Report



#### GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many parks provide recreation facilities and feature irreplaceable natural habitats and cherished historic sites.

This can pose a challenge as the Park Authority must balance the need to protect and preserve these resources with the need to provide recreational opportunities to residents and park users.



The Invasive Management Area (IMA) program alone has 2,450 volunteers that contribute +9,000 volunteer hours to remove invasive plants and restore native habitat.

### **Park Authority Land**



Sa%
 Undeveloped or Not

Actively Managed Natural Area

## Goal

Ensure protection, conservation, preservation and interpretation of cultural resources

 $\bullet$   $\bullet$   $\bullet$   $\bullet$   $\bullet$   $\bullet$   $\bullet$   $\bullet$   $\bullet$ 

Protection and management of Fairfax County's cultural and historic resources is essential in order to make them available to a diverse community, help to educate the public and rejuvenate interest in historic buildings and cultural resource collections.

The Park Authority strives to be a great steward and to cultivate stewardship to preserve these resources for future generations.

#### **Primary Guiding Principles**







**AXAXA** 

Be Great Stewards

**Promote Healthy** 

Lifestyles





Advance Park System Excellence



Strengthen and Foster Partnerships



Be Equitable and

## Recommendations

• The Park Authority commits to the following priority activities and actions necessary to achieve this goal:

*Establish* a suitable facility to preserve, expand, conserve and share county-wide collections.

Actively protect, manage, and preserve the county's cultural and historic resources.

*Cultivate* stewards through the expansion of stewardship education, interpretation, community engagement, and the use of technology.

*Continue* to assess, implement and improve resident curator opportunities.

### GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The Park Authority owns and cares for multiple historic buildings, more than 3,500 archaeological sites and over 3.5 million artifacts.



The Resident Curator Program aims to enliven interest and protect several publicly-owned historic properties that were falling victim to the elements. The program allows tenants to use the structures in return for rehabilitating and maintaining them.



The Park Authority teaches others in the community how to be better stewards through interpretation, engagement, and education efforts.

## Goal

Improve access and opportunities for healthy and active lifestyles

. . . . . . . . . .

The park system serves a diverse public and provides high-quality recreational opportunities to all users.

In doing so, the Park Authority aims to empower residents to improve their health and wellness by equitably providing access to parks, facilities, and programs.

### **Recommendations**

• • • The Park Authority commits to the following priority activities and actions necessary to achieve this goal:

*Improve* park access and expand trail system connections in partnership with county agencies, developers, and other private entities to make it easier to use parks and to support a wide range of athletic activities.

Enhance scholarship programs through dedicated funding sources and partnerships to provide equitable, high-quality opportunities for individuals and families to engage in fitness activities.

#### **Primary Guiding Principles**



Inspire a Passion for Parks







Advance Park System Excellence

Strengthen and Foster Partnerships



Be Equitable and Inclusive





*Prioritize* capital investments and recreation programming and partner with private entities for areas of greatest need for improved or expanded facilities or programs.

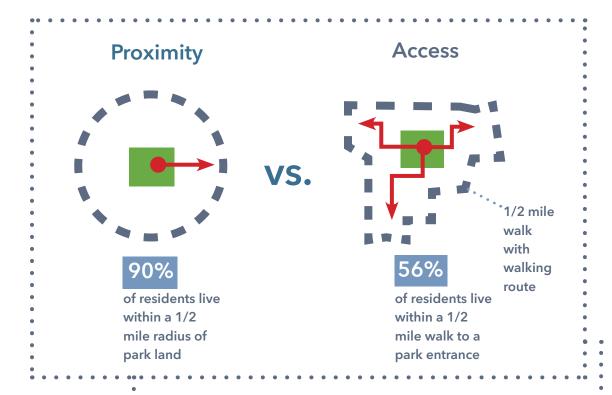
*Continue* to advance the goals of the county's Live Healthy Fairfax and One Fairfax initiatives, including the emphasis on health in Park Authority plans and initiatives and efforts to increase equitable access for physical activities.

#### GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



In FY16, the Park Authority provided almost 22,000 scholarships to allow program access for low-income residents.





Most county residents live near park land, but far fewer have walkable access to a park. Walkable access, as shown in the figure above, is a key indicator of how well and equitably the Park Authority serves the community.



### GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If trends of park use county population growth and fiscal constraint continue as expected, continuing to adequately maintain the park system will be challenging.



The Park Authority currently has close to \$200 million in deferred maintenance needs throughout the park system.



Age of Park Structures

37% Of the 374 11% structures >40 years old in the park 10-20 years old system, 58%, or 217 **6%** 20-30 years old 25% 21% structures, are 30+ years old. 30-40 years old <10 years old

## Goal

Advance as an innovative, responsive, and adaptable organization

. . . . . . . . . . .

The Park Authority is committed to meeting community needs and being the leader in the county, region, and parks and recreation industry.

To continue as an excellent park system requires the focus of a high-performing, dedicated organization, and the support of an empowered community.

## Recommendations

• The Park Authority commits to the following priority activities and actions necessary to achieve this goal:

Expand and improve use of data and technology to support and enhance
organizational performance and
decision-making.

Develop and attain measurable outcomes to ensure high-performance and accountability in the organization.

*Invest* in employee development and provide growth opportunities that empower staff to be innovative, responsive, and adaptable, while remaining user-focused.

*Respond* and adapt strategically to changes in how residents use and what users want in the park system.

*Improve* transparency and inclusion by providing greater opportunities for public input and collaboration with the community through the use of various communication venues, including social media.

#### **Primary Guiding Principles**



Inspire a Passion for Parks

SSION

\$%\* \

Be Great Stewards

**Promote Healthy** 

Lifestyles

Meet Changing Recreation Needs



Advance Park System Excellence

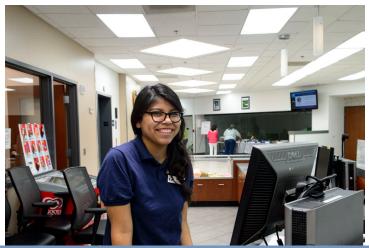


Strengthen and Foster Partnerships



Be Equitable and Inclusive With a workforce of over 2,400 staff and thousands of park volunteers providing an extensive and diverse array of services and programs, a strong commitment to continual training and professional development is essential to meet community needs and sustain the agency.







As the use of electronics and mobile devices grows, the Park Authority has more opportunities to engage and educate park users, as well as a greater ability to utilize data.



## Goal

Provide sustainable financial management to advance the Park Authority mission

• • • • • • • • • •

It is critical to determine strategic priorities in a way that balances the Park Authority mission and fiduciary responsibility.

Despite increasing demands and constrained resources, the Park Authority must continue to meet the needs of the community and support county wide initiatives.

## **Recommendations**

• The Park Authority commits to the following priority activities and actions necessary to achieve this goal:

Implement Total Cost of Ownership model for managing, developing,
and acquiring all existing and future
land, assets, and resources.

> Seek and increase funding from dedicated and alternative sources.

> > *Maintain* sustainable revenue operations.

*Reinvest* in the RECenter system, golf, and other market-based facilities and revenue-generating programs to ensure continued sustainability and competitiveness.

*Increase* opportunities for revenue-generating activities and events.

*Encourage* other entities to provide and maintain high quality park facilities and services.

*Increase* yearly bond cash flow and bond allocation to meet current and future needs.

#### Primary Guiding Principles



Inspire a Passion for Parks

Be Great Stewards

Promote Healthy

Lifestyles







Advance Park System Excellence



Strengthen and Foster Partnerships



Be Equitable and Inclusive

### GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Private citizens, foundations and corporations donated more than \$779,900 to the Fairfax County Park Foundation in FY17 to support a wide array of programs, scholarships, services, parkland and facilities that would otherwise go unfunded.





The Parks Count! Needs Assessment includes a Capital Improvement Framework to facilitate strategic resource allocation for capital projects.

The total projected need in the ten years covered by the report for repairs, upgrades, and new park assets is \$941 million. In FY16, 66.5% of the Park Authority's operating fund came from user fees and 33.5% came from tax dollars. Most park bonds are fully funded by public tax support.

## Implementation

The goals and recommendations in this plan provide a road map for reshaping the parks and recreation system to meet community expectations and priorities, and to achieve the aspirations of the master plan guiding principles.

For the master plan to be successful, all parts of the agency must be moving in the same direction. A few things are critical to make this happen:

- Prioritize and allocate budget and staff resources in support of the master plan;
- Update all agency plans, programs, and initiatives to align with the master plan; and
- Create action plans and recalibrate them as needed to stay on track (strategic plan).

Upon approval of this plan, the Park Authority will check-in on the agency mission and vision to be sure it is consistent with the master plan guiding principles.

## **Partners in Parks**

Partnerships with other county agencies, private entities, and volunteers are vital to providing a great park system.

The Park Authority will continue to nurture existing partnerships, while pursuing new or expanded partnerships that advance the master plan goals.







## IMPLEMENTATION





## **Strategic Plan**

Moving forward, the next step for the Park Authority is to update the strategic plan that focuses specifically on identifying actionable steps towards achieving the master plan goals.

Staff participation in the strategic planning process will be essential to ensure day-to-day work is helping to implement the master plan.

The strategic plan will include objectives and action steps that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound in order to clearly guide implementation.

### Tracking and Reporting Progress

Annual reporting will provide an opportunity to course-correct and refresh master plan recommendations if needed. The master plan will be revisited in five years for a comprehensive refresh and fully updated as the 10-year plan horizon nears.







A Fairfax County, Va. Publication

This master plan ties together ideas and inspiration from countless conversations and working sessions.

Many of these same voices will guide and contribute to accomplishing the goals set forth in this master plan.

Thank you for all of your hard work and support.

- Park Authority Board
- Park Authority Director
- Park Authority Deputy Directors
- Park Authority Leadership Team
- Park Authority Staff
- Partners & Additional Support

Graphic Design by Angelica Rockquemore.

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12055 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Va.

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks



For accommodations, contact Inclusion and ADA Support at 703-324-8563. TTY: Va Relay 711