



Baseball diamond at Greenbriar Park.

9. Parks and Recreation

Parks serve a variety of public functions, including resource protection and providing recreation opportunities. The parks that serve the Fairfax Center Area and the main facilities provided are identified within this report. Different park types serve different functions and have different service areas as follows:

Local Parks primarily offer a variety of active or passive recreation opportunities, in close proximity to county residents and employment centers. Areas designated for natural and/or cultural resource protection may also be included within these parks. Local parks primarily provide facilities for active or passive recreation, or both; provide areas for scheduled and unscheduled recreation activities and social gathering places; and service residential, employment, and mixed-use centers. In suburban settings, park size will typically be at least two and one-half acres and less than 50 acres. In urban areas, park size is typically less than five acres and often less than one-half acre. Visiting time to local parks will typically be less than two hours. Typical local park facilities may include picnic tables, open play tables, athletic fields, playgrounds, and trails. In a suburban setting and depending on the park size and facilities, the local park service area may be up to three miles.

District Parks are larger parks that serve greater geographic areas of the county and provide a variety of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and experiences. Portions of these parks may be designated for natural and/or cultural resource protection. The service area can range from three to six miles, and the size of these parks is typically 50 to 150 acres. Generally, facilities in these parks are larger in number and scale than at Local Parks and support a longer visit. District Parks may combine recreation-oriented complexes of developed facilities with areas of the park that are undeveloped. Typical recreation activities at District Parks include golf, skating, cultural and holiday events, performing arts, sports, and activities scheduled in RECenters. Appropriate facilities include those that support active and passive recreation (often clustered together), areas for programmed activities, and gathering places and areas designated for resource



Football field at Greenbriar Park.



Penderbrook Golf Course.

protection. Lighted facilities and extended hours of operation are typical.

Resource-Based Parks include parkland with significant cultural and natural resources that are under the Park Authority's protection. Interpretative signage, trails, and visitor centers staffed with informational guides are common facilities found at this type of park. There may be times when this type of park is part of a large park, where significant athletic facilities are present in a separate section of the park.

There are 14 public parks totaling 489 acres that are completely or partially within the study area. Penderbrook Golf Course, which is open to the public, is also located within the study area. Additional recreational facilities are provided at county public school sites, private homeowner associations, and residential communities.

Residents and workers from the Fairfax Center Area are also served by park resources located within a reasonable distance in the surrounding planning districts including Bull Run, Fairfax, Pohick, and Upper Potomac, and the City of Fairfax. The majority of parkland serving the Fairfax Center Area is in local serving and stream valley parks. Most of the parkland is forested, which is beneficial in a highly urbanized area by providing habitat protecting numerous natural and cultural resources. This is exemplified by the Park Authority's Fairfax Villa Park. With the exception of the more extensive stream valley parks, such as Difficult Run, park and habitat corridors are fragmented. Connections between the parks and most of the communities they serve lack accessibility via a connected trail system. This lack of park and trail connectivity is further exacerbated by major roads. Existing facilities are listed Appendix E for each park, with planned facilities represented with a "P" in the column.

Just outside of the Fairfax Center Area are 16 parks totaling 3,167 acres maintained by the Park Authority, including larger parks such as Ellanor C. Lawrence, Patriot, and Oak Marr Parks. These parks include athletic fields, trails, and a RECenter with a range of facilities and resources for Fairfax Center Area residents. The City of Fairfax also provides recreation facilities at parks and schools, including playgrounds, picnic areas, basketball courts, and athletic fields. Additionally, the Cross County

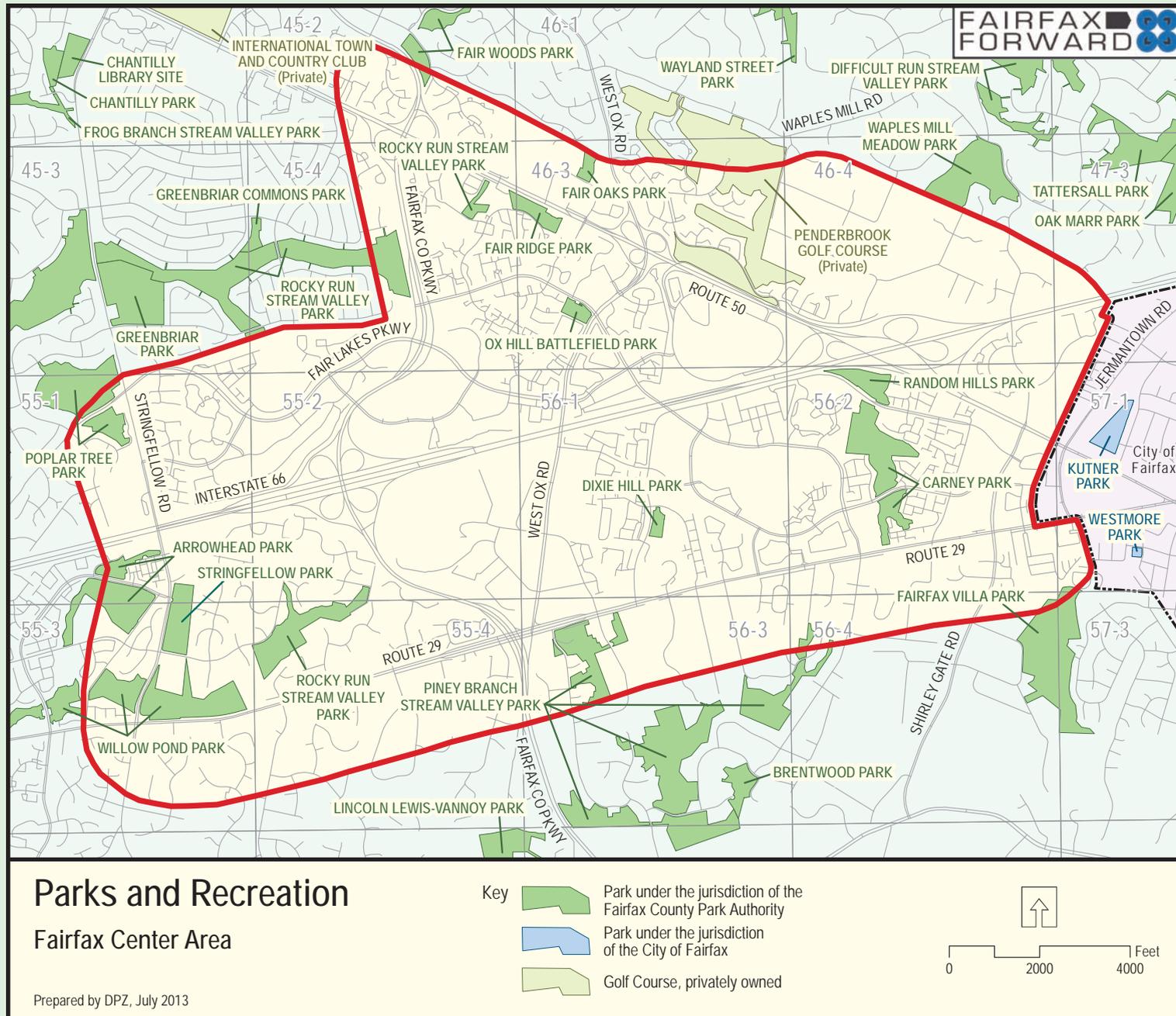


Figure 9.1 Parks serving the Fairfax Center Study Area.



Trail along Rocky Run Stream Valley Park.

Trail passes to the northeast of the Fairfax Center Area through Oak Marr Park and Difficult Run Stream Valley Park. Parks serving the Fairfax Center Area are shown in Figure 9.1. A list of individual public parks within and outside the Fairfax Center Area by classification, jurisdiction, acreage, and date of master plan approval, if appropriate, are found in Appendix E.

Arrowhead, Greenbriar, Poplar Tree, and Stringfellow parks provide athletic facilities in the northwestern portion of the Fairfax Center Area. Facilities include two synthetic turf rectangle fields at Poplar Tree Park and one at Greenbriar Park. Braddock Park provides six lighted softball fields, two rectangular fields, mini-golf, batting cages, picnic area, trails, and an open play area. Patriot Park provides the Park Authority's largest synthetic turf rectangle field and protection of extensive natural resources. Additional athletic facilities are planned to be built at Patriot Park. Oak Marr Park just outside the study area provides two lighted synthetic turf rectangle fields that are designed for cricket use in addition to the multiple sports typically scheduled on the fields.

The stream valley parks in this area provide both significant resource protection and trails through the area. The Gerry Connolly Cross County Trail (GCCCT) is over 40 miles long and connects the northern and southern boundaries of Fairfax County. It is the primary north-south trail corridor in the county, passing just to the northeast of the Fairfax Center Area, through Difficult Run Stream Valley, Little Difficult Run, Oak Marr, and Tattersall parks. Other trails serving the Fairfax Center Area include a system of sidewalks, publicly accessible trails, and trails within parks.

The 650-acre Ellanor C. Lawrence Park is a large resource-based park with an athletic field complex located along Route 28 north of Centreville. The site is primarily forested but also contains meadows, vernal ponds, and is drained by streams ranging in quality from good to excellent. This natural landscape faces great challenges due to invasive plants, deer, and past and present human disturbance. The Walney Visitor Center, located within a reconstructed 1780 farmhouse, offers a variety of educational exhibits with programs relating to local natural and cultural history. Ellanor C. Lawrence Park offers several miles of trails throughout a variety of habitats,

linking the park to the 3.4-mile Rocky Run Stream Valley Trail with communities to the east. Cabell's Mill historic site is available for rental and has a long history of hosting social events. The northwest portion of the park contains a complex of recreational facilities including a lighted synthetic turf field and a playground.

Fairfax Villa is a 58-acre wooded park near Shirley Gate Road that provides trails meandering through a unique example of nearly intact native, upland oak-hickory forest. A significant Native American mining site is present within the park and estimated to have been in operation 5,000 years ago. The park also contains a portion of the Civil War era Kamp Washington and Manassas Gap Railroad.

Oak Marr District Park, Golf Complex, and RECenter provide a wide variety of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities. Outdoor recreation facilities include two lighted rectangle fields, an open play area, picnic tables, a historic site, and trails. The Oak Marr Golf Complex adjoins the RECenter, providing a nine-hole golf course, 18-hole mini golf course, a driving range, and golf lessons. The Oak Marr RECenter has a heated Olympic-sized indoor pool with spa, beach, wading area, diving complex, as two racquetball courts, one with volleyball capacity, fitness center, and sauna. It also provides extensive programs and camps. A RECenter expansion to add fitness and programming areas is scheduled to begin in 2013. Oak Marr Park also has extensive forested areas containing numerous foot trails, but is impacted by deer overpopulation.

Twin Lakes Golf Course is located at the intersection of Braddock Road and Union Mill Road and is listed in Golf Styles Magazine as one of the "100 Must Play" courses of the mid-Atlantic region. The park offers two 18-hole golf courses, a driving range, a practice range, golf lessons, a clubhouse, and multi-use trails. The clubhouse is currently being expanded to better accommodate tournaments and other events.

Non-Park Authority Parks and Facilities

Several key non-County parks also serve residents in the Fairfax Center Area. The City of Fairfax maintains several local-serving parks and school sites that provide recreation facilities and natural areas. Local parks typically provide playgrounds,



Twin Lakes Golf Course.



Trail in Fairfax Villa Park.

playing fields, courts, gymnasiums, fitness centers, urban parks, and trails. The Penderbrook community operates a 135-acre public golf course, including a clubhouse, swimming, tennis, basketball, and fitness center.

Resource-Based Parks

There are many significant natural resources in and around the Fairfax Center Area. The study area includes headwaters for four watersheds and a variety of environmental resources, including Difficult Run, Cub Run, Little Rocky Run, and Popes Head Creek. All of these watersheds with the exception of Difficult Run are tributaries to the Occoquan Reservoir water supply. Difficult Run has been designated as a critical environmental area by the commonwealth and the county in recognition of the serious threat that development poses on water quality, wildlife habitats, and preservation of flora and fauna. Difficult Run also plays an important role in the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay.

The natural areas are a mixture of narrow swaths of low-lying lands in stream valley corridors and isolated, often developed, uplands. The larger parks, including Oak Marr District Park, Random Hills, Carney Park, Ellanor C. Lawrence, and Fairfax Villa Park contain some high-quality natural resources, including upland and bottomland forests, meadows, and streams. These resources are under stress due to intense development associated with encroachments from neighboring parcels, human activities, invasive species, and deer herbivory.

Large stream valley parks in the area contain fairly healthy wetlands and habitat that support uncommon plant as well as animal species. These parks along with several adjacent private parcels constitute the best habitat and stream buffering in the area. Corridors such as Difficult Run Stream Valley Park provide pathways for visitors and wildlife alike to travel throughout large portions of the county. Some high quality water resources also remain with healthy streams and intact vernal pools supporting terrestrial habitat. Willow Pond, Greenbriar Commons, and Piney Branch Stream Valley all have significant bottomland forests and wetlands.

Fairfax Villa Park is a good example of a natural area that has mature oak-hickory forest, which is the dominant climax forest community type in the study area. The relatively undisturbed soils and low levels of invasive plant cover are a sign of a healthy forest that is likely to remain so if managed properly. There has not been coordinated assessment, research, and documentation of natural resources on public and private properties in the Fairfax Center Area, with only Fairfax Villa and Patriot Parks having natural resource inventories.

Vegetation in Dixie Hill and Fair Ridge Parks is in poor health due to invasive plants and deer overpopulation. Poplar Tree Park has a good quality area of old growth northern hardpan basic oak hickory forest, which may be impacted by the Stringfellow Road widening project currently underway.

Park Access and Connectivity

Some of the larger community and district parks in and around the Fairfax Center Area are located along major roads, which make them accessible by automobile. Bike and pedestrian access is difficult because roads with heavy traffic present barriers and in most cases, there is a lack of interconnecting trails.

Many of the local and stream valley parks are accessible by pedestrians from adjacent communities because the parks were embedded within these communities as they were developed. While serving immediate communities, these parks are often difficult for the larger community to use due to not being readily accessible from major roads. Fairfax Villa, both the park and the community, are an example. Sometimes there are sidewalks or trails, but often informal paths from yards lead into the parks, which are not usually connected to the comprehensive countywide trail system.

A major weakness in the trail system in this area is the lack of interconnection between the parks or the greater communities they serve. This is mostly due to patchwork development and major roadways that stand in the way of potential trail connections. Just to the west of the Fairfax Center Area, a network of trails and sidewalks provides a good level of connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists west to



Dixie Hill Park.



Ox Hill Battlefield Park.

Ellanor C. Lawrence Park. The existing trail network is shown in Figure 4.3.

Anticipated Land Use and Demographic Changes

The number of housing units and employment in this area will continue to grow at a moderate rate. A range of higher density and mixed-use developments are recommended for the Fairfax Center Area. Most significant land use changes will likely occur through redevelopment in areas developed prior to 1985. Without increases in stormwater management, control of human activities, white-tailed deer population, and nonnative invasive species, the quality of preserved parkland is threatened.

Several stormwater improvement projects are planned in and around the Fairfax Center Area. The proposed projects range from fixing existing stormwater facilities to new regional ponds, and stream restorations. While these projects will improve water quality within the area, care must be taken not to damage park resources. Affected parks include Ellanor C. Lawrence, Rocky Run Stream Valley, Difficult Run Stream Valley, Little Difficult Run Stream Valley, Willow Pond, all with several proposed projects, as well as at least one project in Piney Branch Stream Valley and at Lincoln Lewis Vannoy Parks.

Park Service Levels and Needs

The Fairfax Center Area is planned and developed with a mix of land uses to balance the residential and commercial uses. Parks in this area serve both those who live and work here. As this area has built out there have been few new parks and park facilities added compared to elsewhere in the county. Most of the public parkland and recreation facilities that serve area residents and employees are provided outside the Fairfax Center Area. Privately provided small scale recreation facilities augment the public provision of parks and recreation, but are not easily inventoried. Publicly accessible sidewalks and trails on non-public land also augment the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities.

To measure the level of park service, the Park Authority has developed population-based service level standards for parkland and park facilities. Using adopted service level standards, staff has identified a need for all types of parkland and recreational

facilities in this area. Existing parks within the Fairfax Center Area (Arrowhead, Carney, Dixie Hill, Fairfax Villa, Fair Oaks, Fair Ridge, Fair Woods, Greenbriar Commons, Ox Hill Battlefield, Poplar Tree, Random Hills, Stringfellow, Willow Pond, and Piney Branch Stream Valley Parks) meet only a portion of the demand for parkland and recreation facilities generated by development in the Fairfax Center Area. Even with the consideration of nearby parks outside of the Fairfax Center Area, only a portion of the demand for parkland at existing conditions in the Fairfax Center Area is met. In addition to parkland, the recreational facilities in greatest need in this area include basketball courts, playgrounds, diamond fields, rectangle fields, picnic shelters with amenities, a small scale skate park, and trails. A service level analysis was compiled using service level data for Fairfax and Bull Run Planning District. Current population data and projections for the Fairfax Center Area will be needed in order to conduct a more specific analysis for the study area.

The application of the urban parks policy guidance is also appropriate in the Fairfax Center Area for places that develop more densely. Integration of urban park features in this area include plazas, gathering places, amphitheater/performance spaces, special landscaping, fountains, sculpture, and street furniture are needed as are more recreation uses such as tennis courts, basketball courts, volleyball courts, bocce courts, tot lots, water play features, and skateboarding facilities. Incorporating recreation features to be more readily accessible by nonmotorized means in mixed-use settings will better serve the Fairfax Center Area with a full range of local recreation opportunities.