

# THE FUTURE OF SALONA PARK

## Statement by the Salona Park Task Force, June 2012

**Background/Summary.** In 2005, an agreement was executed between the DuVal family, owners of the property called Salona, and the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) to grant under a perpetual conservation easement approximately 41.5 acres of the property for use as parkland. The property is located at 1235 Dolley Madison Boulevard. The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) was given standing to enforce the terms of the easement. The easement area surrounds the historic Salona house, which is not part of the park easement. (A map showing the layout of the property and the development plan proposed in the FCPA draft plan for Salona Park is attached.)

The stated purpose of the easement is “to preserve the open, scenic, natural, and historic character and values of the Property, as well as certain public recreational values of the Property....” The easement includes allowed and disallowed public uses.

As part of its planning process for Salona Park, the Park Authority had a Cultural Landscape Report prepared by John Milner Associates of Charlottesville, Virginia, which analyzed the property’s historical and natural resources. The report, issued in July 2008, noted that “Future protection and sensitive maintenance of the property is crucial to preserving the integrity of this significant and rare historic landscape.”

In November 2010, the Park Authority held a public comment meeting to present a Draft Salona Park Master Plan. In the area at the front of the property the draft plan proposed two natural grass rectangular athletic fields with supporting facilities, 100 parking spaces, playground, picnic area, dog park, meadow restoration area, agriculture/education or native grass preservation area, interpretive features, and trails. A trail network was proposed for the remainder of the property.

In response to the many comments that were made at the public meeting recommending alternative uses, a decision was made to expand the community outreach effort by appointing a representative Task Force “to identify, evaluate, and recommend alternative uses” for Salona Park. The Task Force was appointed by Dranesville Supervisor, John Foust, and Dranesville representative to the Park Authority Board, Kevin Fay.

The Salona Park Task Force began its work in the summer of 2011 and since that time we have been conducting a thorough study of the site and of options for its use. We are planning to hold a public meeting October 4, 2012 to hear community views. Detailed documentation and Information regarding the Salona property, including the easement, the Cultural Landscape Report, the planning process, and public comments on the draft plan, as well as information regarding the task force, are available on the Park Authority website – [www.FairfaxCounty.gov/parks/plandev/Salona.htm](http://www.FairfaxCounty.gov/parks/plandev/Salona.htm).

This brief statement by the Task Force is intended to provide a summary introduction to the Salona property, including its historical and natural resources, as well as a description of the process followed in developing a plan for a public park, and how the Task Force is conducting its work.

**Historical importance of Salona.** The history of Salona goes back nearly 300 years, when, in 1719, Thomas Lee, grandfather of “Light Horse Harry” Lee and great grandfather of Robert E. Lee, took out a grant of 2,862 acres along the Potomac River that became known as the Langley Tract. A portion of this land was later named Salona. The property remained in the Lee family until 1811.

In the years that followed, Salona witnessed significant historical events. President James Madison is believed to have been at Salona the night the British invaded and burned the city of Washington. At the time of the Civil War, Salona served as headquarters for General William Farrar (“Baldy”) Smith for his division of Federal troops. The division encampment of nearly 13,000 troops was known as Camp Griffin. Smith was instrumental in getting General George McClellan, who became the head of the Union Army, to form the Vermont Brigade, the first brigade to consist totally of regiments from a single state, which made camp at the Salona property during the fall and winter of 1861-62. McClellan was occasionally in the area during that period and is known to have spent a night at Salona. Life was difficult for the troops who lived at the camp, and many died and were buried there.

As a property with a rich history, Salona is likely to be rich in archaeological findings, such as slave dwellings and a slave cemetery, as well as Civil War graves and Civil War-related structures and artifacts. There may also be findings related to the site’s long history as a working farm. The existing Salona house is thought to have been built c. 1800. The Salona Cultural Landscape Report recommends that an archaeological investigation of the property should be conducted prior to any ground-disturbing activities to determine the presence or absence of historical sites. The Draft Salona Master Plan supports this recommendation.

**The Salona landscape.** Salona currently is a 52-acre property, located within the Pimmit Run watershed. The Park Authority holds a perpetual easement on a 41.5-acre portion of the property. The front of the property, along Dolley Madison Boulevard, is composed of three large fields separated by narrow hedgerows of trees. The southern part of the site contains trees and undergrowth which have grown up over the last 50 to 60 years. At the center of these areas is the privately owned historic Salona house and outbuildings, including a barn, smokehouse, outside kitchen/office, and privy/bathhouse. The Salona house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Virginia Landmarks Register, and the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites.

The Salona Cultural Landscape Report analyzed and evaluated the history and current physical condition of the property, including the buildings, topography, and vegetation. It noted that the property contains buildings, structures, archaeological resources, and landscape features that are of interpretive, educational, and scientific value to the public and is one of the last sizeable open spaces in McLean. The Report also stated that “there are certain aspects or areas of the landscape that are particularly sensitive to disturbance by human use and changes. These areas include known and potential archaeological resources, and natural systems. As with the historic resources that contribute to the integrity of the landscape..., protection of archaeological and natural resources during rehabilitation of the property require special consideration.”

The Report includes numerous guidelines and recommendations for the treatment of the historic landscape of Salona, including minimizing disturbance associated with the installation of visitor access facilities and systems that cross or abut wetlands to preserve existing landforms, and plant and animal life; and developing visual buffers along property lines abutting the surrounding neighborhoods. The full Report with recommendations is on the Park Authority website.

**The Fairfax County Park Authority planning process.** After the Cultural Landscape Report was issued, the FCPA in February 2010 held a preliminary public meeting prior to issuing an initial draft master plan in June 2010. This initial draft master plan contained three alternative concept plans for development of Salona. After review by the FCPA Board, a second draft master plan, which contained a single preferred alternative, was made available to the public on the Salona webpage in September 2010.

As noted above, and as permitted in the easement, this draft plan provided for two natural grass, irrigated, unlighted rectangular athletic fields, along with a 100 space parking area, located in two existing fields adjacent to Dolley Madison Boulevard and Buchanan Street. The draft plan also provided for other uses for the three fields in this front area, including an agriculture/education or native grass preservation area, a dog park, a meadow restoration and interpretation area, picnic area, playground, interpretative features, and walking trails.

A public comment meeting on this draft plan was held two months later, in November 2010. More than 130 individuals attended. Many of those who attended proposed uses other than those provided in the draft plan. The Park Authority accepted written comments through the end of the year. These included comments in support of rectangular fields as well as recommendations for alternative uses. Alternative uses that were proposed at the meeting and in subsequent written comments included: leaving the land as is for now; preserving, interpreting, and making accessible the historical and environmental features of the property; creating a sense of identity for the community; creating a sense of community for seniors; building a bluebird trail; preserving hedgerows and meadows; eliminating invasive species; emphasizing conservation and natural areas; and numerous others. A summary of comments may be found on the above-noted website.

At the present time there is no funding available for development of Salona Park.

**The Salona Park Task Force.** The stated mission of the Task Force is as follows:

“The Task Force will serve as an advisory body. Its members will represent a wide range of public interests. The Task Force shall expand on efforts to bring the diverse ideas and perspectives of the community into the park planning process. The Task Force shall reach out to the community and interested groups to solicit and develop recommendations that can be incorporated into the Master Plan. The recommendations adopted by the Task Force shall seek to reflect the consensus of the community and be consistent with the conservation easement and the financial investment made by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and FCPA.”

The membership of the Task Force is composed as follows: one member each appointed by the Dranesville District Supervisor and the Dranesville District Park Authority member, and one individual appointed by each of the following organizations: Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, McLean Citizens Association, Greater McLean Chamber of Commerce, McLean Youth Athletics, Inc., Fairfax County History Commission, Surrounding Neighborhood, and the Conservation Easement Grantors (Dan or Karen DuVal). The Dranesville District Supervisor's office provides administrative support to the Task Force, and the FCPA provides support on an as needed and available basis. Their representatives attend the Task Force meetings.

Recognizing the volume of information that needed to be gathered and reviewed, the Task Force has been holding meetings twice a month at which we have consulted with experts and organizations interested in the future of Salona Park. We have met with representatives of sports organizations, seniors, schools, friends of parks organizations, Fairfax County Master Naturalists, as well as experts in green building, McLean history, county specialists in horticulture and archaeology, and others. We have walked the site with county experts and we have visited local parks to learn about their programs and experiences.

As the result of the work that we have done, we believe that Salona offers many opportunities for McLean residents of all ages. In making our recommendations, we believe it is important to take into consideration the rich history of Salona, including its potential archaeological findings; what the community wants and needs; the impact of development on the environment; the initial and ongoing costs of development; and the impact on traffic and parking. Efforts are underway to acquire from the county information regarding archaeological conditions (evidence of Salona's historical experience), and environmental conditions (drainage and Resource Protection Area issues).

We are planning to hold a public meeting October 4, 2012 at which time we will communicate the information we have gathered and solicit the views of the public regarding alternative uses for Salona Park. Based on what we have learned, we will develop our recommendations, which will then be presented and discussed at a second public meeting. As a final step, the recommendations of the Task Force will be submitted for consideration for inclusion in the Master Plan for Salona Park.